

INSANITY

DRAWER 2

Mrs. LINCOLN

LATER YEARS

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Mary Todd Lincoln

Insanity

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Jan's Empress, and the shadow of insanity thrown across the intelligence of Mrs. Lincoln relieves her from reproach or blame. Instead of a mocking figure, disgracing her name and station and country, she, too, becomes an object of commiseration, not knowing the purport of her own words or the result of her own deeds, or perhaps vainly struggling to restrain them both, and regretting in her saner intervals the very acts she was at other times unable to control. And Lincoln—who that reveres and loves his memory will not respect his character more profoundly, and feel that he has another and tenderer claim upon our sympathy and honor, since we know that even this our did not pass from him. Amid the storms of party hate and rebellious strife, amid agonies—not irreverently be it said, like those of the Cross—for he suffered for us—the hyssop of domestic misery was pressed to his lips and he too said: "Father; forgive; they know not what they do."

New York, Jan. 8. ADAM BADEAU.

—Private letters received from Chicago state that Mrs. Lincoln is insane beyond all doubt. She recently sold all the furniture in her house, and has two old men as body-guard, believing she will be robbed and murdered. Her mania is for selling, and a dread lest she come to want.

12/26/1868

Mrs. Lincoln's Present Residence.

A friend of the Journal in California sends us the following from the Alta California of San Francisco, with the request to know if the statement is true:

"It is a sad fact that Mrs. Lincoln is living a secluded life in an interior town of France, and declines to return to America lest she may be again placed in a lunatic asylum."

The only ground for the above statement consists of the fact that Mrs. Lincoln has chosen, for some months past, and still chooses, so far as we know, to reside in the romantic city of Pau, near the base of the Pyrenees, in southern France. The fact that she is in almost weekly cordial and intelligent correspondence with her friends in this city, would indicate that the rest of the story is without foundation. — Springfield Journal. November, 29, 1878.

Mrs. Lincoln Sent to an Asylum.

On the 19th of May the trial of the question of the sanity of Mrs. Lincoln, widow of Abraham Lincoln, came up in the County Court of Cook County, Illinois. The proceedings were based on a petition filed by R. Lincoln, setting forth that his mother has property not exceeding \$75,000; that she is non compos mentis, and incapable of managing her estate, and praying for the issuance of an order for a warrant and venire to test the question of her sanity. The petition was accompanied by a certificate of the family physician to the effect that he had examined Mrs. Lincoln and was of the opinion that she was insane and a fit subject for the hospital treatment. Several witnesses testified to eccentricities in the conduct of Mrs. Lincoln, which commenced with the assassination of Mr. Lincoln, and which have become marked as time progressed. She imagined she heard voices in the walls, that strange beings beset her in the entries of the hotels, and that she was the victim of poisoning plots, etc. Her closets are full of unopened packages of goods which she has ordered sent to her room. After a short argument the case was given to the jury, who brought in a verdict in accordance with the facts elicited. Mrs. Lincoln will be removed to the hospital at Batavia, Ill. Her relatives and friends delayed this step as long as was considered prudent, but finally agreed that nothing else would suffice. At the announcement of the verdict, Robert Lincoln took the hand of his mother affectionately, when she exclaimed, "Oh, Robert, to think that my son would ever have done this!" There were but few spectators in court. — June 1, 1875.

Mrs. Lincoln's New Home.

A St. Louis correspondent of the Globe Democrat writes of the institution where Mrs. Lincoln's home is to be: The asylum is known as the "Cincinnati Sanitarium," situated in the village of College Hill, on the Mount Pleasant road, some six miles from the Probasco fountain, and reached by street cars to Cummingsville thence by bus to the place of destination. The grounds and buildings were originally appropriated for female educational purposes under the name of "Ohio Female College." Three years ago the premises were purchased by ten medical gentlemen with wide experience in the treatment of demented cases, and appropriated to its present use. The grounds are about 300 feet front, and enough deep to embrace 17 acres, and are covered with grass, trees, shrubberies, walks, arbors, and lakes. The main building is at the rear end of the grounds and reached through a long avenue, shaded with trees and margined with grasses. It is of brick, four stories high, about 100 feet front by 100 in style and elaborate in execution. The depth. The architecture is gothic in premises give no indication that they are for lunatic purposes. No black iron bars shade the windows to give it the appearance of a prison, but in their stead, extending midway up the windows, are apparently delicate wire secure enough to prevent escape, that serve to banish from the patient's mind the terrible truth of imprisonment and restraint. The rooms of the institution are elegantly furnished, and admirably served, especially those in the department to which Mrs. Lincoln has been assigned. — June 15, 1875.

that her age is 56 years; that the disease is of unknown duration, and is not with her hereditary; that she is not subject to epilepsy; that she does not manifest homicidal or suicidal tendencies, and that she is not a pauper.

Mr. Swett then made application to the court for the issuance of a warrant. The request was granted, and court officer Hanchett served the warrant on Mrs. Lincoln. She regarded it with unconcern, and soon after left the court in company with Messrs. Arnold and Swett. The three entered a carriage and drove to the Grand Pacific Hotel, where she remained last night under the surveillance of a sheriff's deputy. This forenoon she will be conveyed to the private insane asylum at Batavia, superintended by Dr. R. J. Patterson, and known as Bellevue Place. — Chicago paper June 3, 1877.

Mrs. Abraham Lincoln.

A case of sad interest to the nation at large unexpectedly broke in upon the monotonous routine of the county court yesterday. It was the trial of the question of sanity of Mrs. Lincoln the widow of Abraham Lincoln, president. Besides the lawyers and persons summoned as witnesses, there were very few in the court room when the venerable lady, her son, and her friends entered. But the report of the nature of the trial soon spread thru the county buildings, and the court room soon became crowded.

Mrs. Lincoln, gentle looking and modestly attired, was regarded with pity by all present; and not frequently during the proceedings, particularly during her son's recital of her eccentricities, many as well as the witnesses were affected. The proceedings were instituted by her son, Mr. Robt. T. Lincoln, through feelings of concern for his mother's safety. Still Mrs. Lincoln did not exhibit any annoyance with him for his action until the verdict was returned. She was perfectly cognizant of what had taken place, but displayed no emotion. But when Mr. Lincoln approached her after the verdict, and taking her hand spoke affectionately, the lady sadly, sorrowfully exclaimed: "Oh Robert, to think that my son would ever have done this!" Mr. Lincoln turned aside and concealed his grief. The calamity dates from the assassination of President Lincoln, and developed itself in different vagaries; at one time in extreme sollicitousness for her son's health, at another in imagining that spirits conversed with her; again in apprehending personal violence, and in unnecessary and extravagant expenditures.

The proceedings were based on a petition filed by Robert Lincoln, setting forth that Mary Lincoln, his mother, has property and effects, consisting of negotiable securities and other personal property not exceeding \$75,000; that she is non compos mentis and incapable of managing her estate; and praying for the issuance of an order for a warrant and venire to test the question of her sanity.

The petition was accompanied with a certificate from Dr. Ralph N. Isham to the effect that he examined Mrs. Lincoln, and was of the opinion that she is insane, and a fit subject for hospital treatment.

Hon. Leonard Swett and Benjamin F. Ayres supported the petition, and Isaac N. Arnold appeared for Mrs. Lincoln. Mr. Ayres opened the trial by a brief statement to the jury, saying that the friends of Mrs. Lincoln had to their intense grief discovered that she was suffering from a severe mental malady.

After hearing the evidence and a brief address by the Hon. Leonard Swett the jury retired. They were ten minutes in consultation, and brought in the following verdict:

We the undersigned jurors in the case of Mary Lincoln, alleged to be insane, having heard the evidence in the case, are satisfied that the said Mary Lincoln is insane, and is a fit person to be sent to a state hospital for the insane; that she is a resident of the state of Illinois, and county of Cook;

1887
WAS MRS. LINCOLN INSANE?

**THE UNACCOUNTABLE JEALOUSY OF THE
MARTYRED PRESIDENT'S WIFE.**

Gen. Badeau Throws Some Light on Mrs. Lincoln's Eccentricities—Her Ungovernable Rage Aroused by Trifles—Strange Insults to Mrs. Ord, Mrs. Grant and Others—Lincoln's Bearing Through It All.

The account of Lincoln's love-making in his history by Nicolay and Hay seems almost ominous when read by the light of later knowledge. The anxieties and forebodings and absolute agony of the future President, on the eve of marriage, the most incredulous might say, presaged the destiny that impended. For no one knows the character of Abraham Lincoln, his godlike patience, his ineffable sweetness, his transcendent charity amid all the tremendous worries of war and revolution and public affairs, who is ignorant of what he endured of private woe, and no one rightly judges the unfortunate partner of his elevation and unwitting cause of many of his miseries, who forgets that she had "eaten on the insane root that takes the reason prisoner."

The country knows, but has preferred to forget, the strangeness of Mrs. Lincoln's conduct at intervals after her husband's death. Many of the most extraordinary incidents in her career were not revealed, out of delicacy to others and tenderness to one who had been the sharer of Abraham Lincoln's fortunes, and the mother of his family; but enough was apparent to shock and pain the public sense, when finally the conflict with her own son, so highly respected, the dragging of their affairs into a public court, the necessary supervision of the poor lady's finances and restraint of her actions, if not of her person, disclosed the fact that her mind had been diseased.

A FAMILY'S SAD SECRET.

This threw a light on circumstances until then inexplicable. It relieved Mrs. Lincoln herself from the charge of heartlessness, of mercenary behavior, of indifference to her husband's happiness; it approved the action of the son which, in some quarters, had been gravely misunderstood and, above all, it showed the suffering Abraham Lincoln must have endured all through those years in which he bore the burden of a struggling nation upon his shoulders—whether he knew or only feared the truth or whether he went on calmly in the sad thought that his saddest forebodings before the marriage were fulfilled.

The first time that I saw Mrs. Lincoln was when I accompanied Mrs. Grant to the White House, for her first visit there as the wife of the General-in-Chief. The next that I now recall was in March, 1864, when Mrs. Lincoln, with the President, visited City Point. They went on a steamer, escorted by a naval vessel of which Capt. John S. Barnes was in command, and remained for some weeks in the James River under the bluff on which the headquarters were established. Here they slept and usually took their meals, but sometimes both ascended the hill and were entertained at the mess of Gen. Grant.

On the 26th of March a distinguished party from Washington joined them, among whom I remember especially Mr. Geoffroi, the French Minister. It was proposed that an excursion should be made to the front of the Army of the Potomac, about ten or twelve miles away, and Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Grant were of the company. There was a military railroad which took the illustrious guests a great portion of the way, and then the men were mounted, but Mrs. Grant and Mrs. Lincoln went on in an ambulance, as it was called—a sort of half-open carriage with two seats besides that for the driver. I was detailed to escort them, and of course sat on the front seat facing the ladies, with my back to the horses.

MRS. LINCOLN'S EXTRAORDINARY JEALOUSY.

In the course of conversation I mentioned that all the wives of officers at the army front had been ordered to the rear—a sure sign that active operations were in contemplation. I said not a lady had been allowed to remain, except Mrs. Griffin, the wife of Gen. Charles Griffin, who had obtained a special permission from the President. At this Mrs. Lincoln was in a rage. "What do you mean by that, sir?" she exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that she saw the President alone? Do you know that I never allow the President to see any woman alone?" She was absolutely jealous of poor, ugly Abraham Lincoln. I tried to pacify her and to palliate my remark, but she was fairly boiling

ing over with rage. "That's a very equivocal smile, sir," she exclaimed. "Let me out of this carriage at once. I will ask the President if he saw that woman alone." Mrs. Griffin was one of the best known and most elegant women in Washington, afterwards the Countess Esterhazy, a Carroll and a personal acquaintance of Mrs. Grant, who strove to mollify the excited spouse, but in vain. Mrs. Lincoln again bade me stop the driver, and when I hesitated to obey she thrust her arms past me to the front of the carriage and held the driver fast. But Mrs. Grant finally prevailed on her to wait till the whole party alighted, and then Gen. Meade came up to pay his respects to the wife of the President. I had intended to offer Mrs. Lincoln my arm and endeavor to prevent a scene, but Meade, of course, as my superior, had the right to escort her, and I had no chance to warn him. I saw them go off together, and remained in fear and trembling for what might occur in the presence of the foreign Minister and other important strangers.

AN OCCASION FOR DIPLOMACY.

But Gen. Meade was very adroit, and when they returned Mrs. Lincoln looked at me significantly and said: "Gen. Meade is a gentleman, sir. He says it was not the President who gave Mrs. Griffin the permit, but the Secretary of War." Meade was the son of a diplomatist and had evidently inherited some of his father's skill.

At night, when we were back in camp, Mrs. Grant talked over the matter with me and said the whole affair was so distressing and mortifying that we must never either mention it to any one; at least, I was to be absolutely silent, and she would disclose it only to the General. But the next day I was released from my pledge, for "worse remained behind."

The same party went in the morning to visit the Army of the Janies on the north side of the river, commanded by Gen. Ord. The arrangements were somewhat similar to those of the day before. We went up the river in a steamer, and then the men again took horses and Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Grant went in an ambulance. I was detailed as before to act as escort, but I asked for a companion in the duty; for after my experience of the previous day I did not wish to be the only officer in the carriage. So Gen. Horace Porter was ordered to join the party. Mrs. Ord was with her husband. As she was the wife of the commander of an army she was not subject to the order for return, though before that day was over she wished herself in Washington or anywhere else away from the army, I am sure. She was mounted, and as the ambulance was full, she remained on her horse and rode for awhile by the side of the President, and ahead of Mrs. Lincoln.

"TRIFLES LIGHT AS AIR."

As soon as Mrs. Lincoln discovered this her rage was beyond all bounds. "What does the woman mean," she exclaimed, "by riding by the side of the President and ahead of me? Does she suppose that he wants her by the side of him?" She was in a frenzy of excitement, and language and action both became more extravagant every moment. Mrs. Grant again endeavored to pacify her, but then Mrs. Lincoln got angry with Mrs. Grant, and all that Porter and I could do was to see that nothing worse than words occurred. We feared she might jump out of the vehicle and shout to the cavalcade. Once she said to Mrs. Grant in her transports: "I suppose you think you'll get to the White House yourself, don't you?" Mrs. Grant was very calm and dignified, and merely replied that she was quite satisfied with her present position; it was far greater than she had ever expected to attain. Then Mrs. Lincoln exclaimed: "Oh! you had better take it if you can get it. This very nice." Then she returned to Mrs. Ord, but Mrs. Grant deflected her friend at the risk of arousing greater vehemence.

Once when there was a halt, Major Seward, a nephew of the Secretary of State and an officer of Gen. Ord's staff, rode up, and trying to say something jocular, remarked: "The President's horse is very gallant, Mrs. Lincoln; he insists on riding by the side of Mrs. Ord?" This of course added fuel to the flame. "What do you mean by that, sir?" she cried. Seward discovered that he had made a huge mistake, and his horse at once developed a peculiarity that compelled him to ride behind, to get out of the way of the storm.

Finally the party arrived at its destination, and Mrs. Ord came up to the ambulance. Then Mrs. Lincoln positively insulted her, called her vile names in the presence of a crowd of officers, and asked what she meant by following up the President. The poor woman burst into tears and inquired what she had done, but Mrs. Lincoln refused to be appeased, and stormed till she was tired. Mrs. Grant still tried to stand by her friend, and everybody was shocked and horrified. But all things come to an end, and after a while we returned to City Point.

HOW LINCOLN BORE THE HUMILIATION.

That night the President and Mrs. Lincoln entertained Gen. and Mrs. Grant and the General's staff at dinner on the steamer, and before us all Mrs. Lincoln berated Gen. Ord to the President and urged that he should be removed. He was unfit for his place, she said, to say nothing of his wife. Gen. Grant sat next and defended his officer bravely. Of course Gen. Ord was not removed.

During all this visit similar scenes were occurring. Mrs. Lincoln repeatedly attacked her husband in the presence of officers because of these two ladies, and I never suffered greater humiliation and pain on account of one not a near personal friend than when I saw the head of the State—the man who carried all the cares of the nation at such a crisis—subjected to this inexpressible public mortification. He bore it as Christ might have done, with an expres-

sion of pain and sadness that cut one to the heart, but with supreme calmness and dignity. He called her "mother," with his old-time plainness; he pleaded with eyes and tones, and endeavored to explain or palliate the offenses of other, till she turned on him like a tigress, and then he walked away, hiding that noble, ugly face that we might not catch the full expression of its misery.

THE MARTYR PRESIDENT'S COURTESY.

Gen. Sherman was a witness of some of these episodes and mentioned them in his memoirs many years ago. Capt. Barnes, of the navy, was a witness and a sufferer too. Barnes had accompanied Mrs. Ord on her unfortunate ride and refused afterwards to say that the lady was to blame. Mrs. Lincoln never forgave him. A day or two afterwards he went to speak to the President on some official matter when Mrs. Lincoln and several others were present. The President's wife said something to him unusually offensive that all the company could hear. Lincoln was silent, but after a moment he went up to the young officer and taking him by the arm led him into his own cabin, to show him a map or a paper he said. He made no remark, Barnes told me, upon what had occurred. He could not rebuke his wife, but he showed his regret and his regard for the officer with a touch of what seemed to me the most exquisite breeding imaginable.

Shortly before these occurrences Mrs. Stanton had visited City Point and I chanced to ask her some question about the President's wife. "I do not visit Mrs. Lincoln," was the reply. I thought I must have been mistaken. The wife of the Secretary of War must visit the wife of the President, and I renewed my inquiry. "Understand me, sir," she repeated; "I do not go to the White House; I do not visit Mrs. Lincoln." I was not intimate with her at the time, nor indeed ever, and this remark was so extraordinary that I never forgot it, but I understood it afterwards.

MRS. LINCOLN REBUKES MRS. GRANT.

Mrs. Lincoln continued her conduct towards Mrs. Grant, who strove to placate her, and then Mrs. Lincoln became more outrageous still. She once rebuked Mrs. Grant for sitting in her presence. "How dare you be seated," she said, "until I invite you?" Altogether it was a hateful experience at that tremendous crisis in the nation's history, for all this was just before the army started on its last campaign.

But the war ended and the President and Mrs. Lincoln had returned to Washington when Gen. Grant arrived from Appomattox, bringing Mrs. Grant with him. Two nights afterwards both Gen. and Mrs. Grant, and the Secretary of War and Mrs. Stanton, were invited to accompany the President and Mrs. Lincoln to the play. No answer had yet been sent when Mrs. Stanton called on Mrs. Grant to inquire if she meant to be one of the party. "For," said Mrs. Stanton, "unless you accept the invitation, I shall refuse. I will not sit without you in the box with Mrs. Lincoln." Mrs. Grant also was tired out with what she had endured and decided not to go to the play, little dreaming of the terrible experience she was thus escaping. She determined to go that night to Burlington, in New Jersey, where her children were at school, and asked the General to accompany her. She sent a note of apology to Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Stanton also declined the invitation. They may both thus have saved their husbands' lives.

HER GROWING ECCENTRICITIES.

After the murder of the President the eccentricities of Mrs. Lincoln became more apparent than ever, and people began to wonder whether her mind had not been affected by her terrible misfortune. Mr. Seward told me that she sold the President's shirts, with his initials marked on them, before she left the White House, and that learning the linen was for sale at a shop in Pennsylvania avenue he sent and bought it privately. She lingered at the Executive mansion a long while after all arrangements should have been made for her departure, keeping the new President out of his proper residence. Afterwards she made appeals to public men and to the country for pensions and other pecuniary aid, though there was no need for public application. She went abroad doing strange things and carrying the honored name of Abraham Lincoln into strange and sometimes unfit company, for she was greatly neglected and felt the neglect. While I was Consul-General at London I learned of her living in an obscure quarter and went to see her. She was touched by the attention, and when I asked her to my house—for it seemed wrong that the widow of the man who had done so much for us all should be ignored by any American representative—she wrote me a note of thanks, betraying how rare such courtesies had become to her then.

HER INSANITY DEMONSTRATED.

The next I heard of the poor woman was the scandal of the courts in Chicago, when the fact was made clear that she was insane. It was a great relief to me to learn it, and doubtless the disclosure of this secret which her son must have long suspected—though, like the Spartan boy, he cloaked his pain—was to him a sort of terrible satisfaction. It vindicated his conduct; it told for him what he had concealed; it proved him a worthy son of that great father who also bore his fate so heroically.

The revelation not only showed these two as noble sufferers, but redeemed the unfortunate woman herself from the odium for which she was not responsible. The world had known that she seemed to defy and malign her son, that she had appeared to do things unworthy of the wife or widow of the great martyr of our history; had even seemed to blot the nation's fame; but the pitiful story of Miramar casts no reflection on Maximilian.



A FEW BATAVIA HOMES.

this line of work for the past fourteen years. The company was incorporated under the present style in 1873, with a capital of \$100,000.

Bellevue Place.

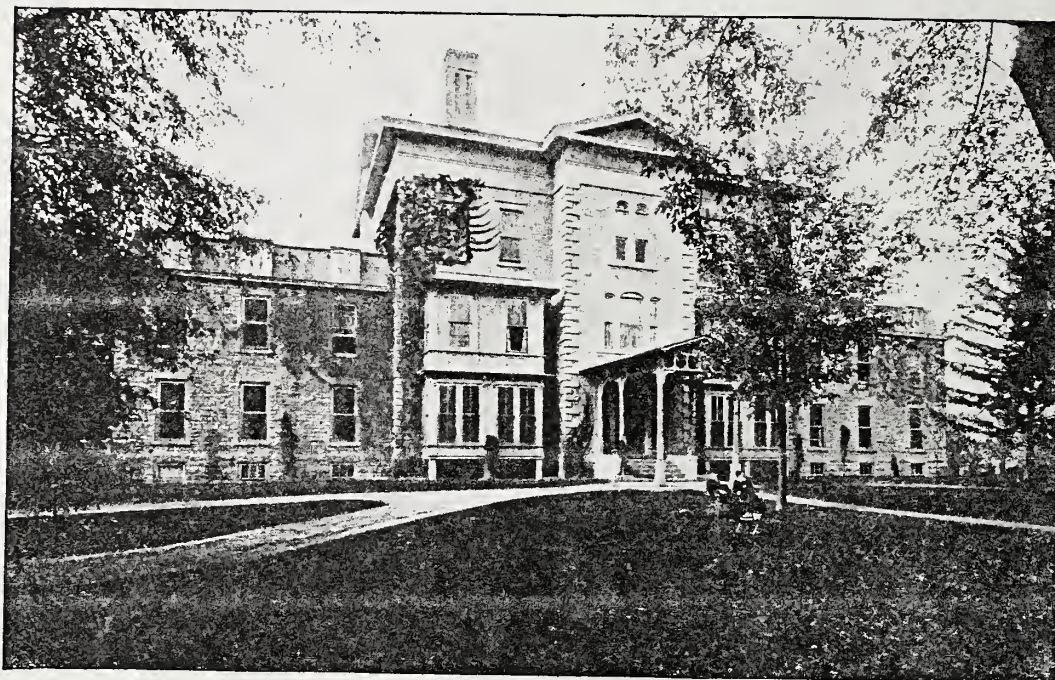
Such is the name, and such the location, of a retreat specially founded and maintained for the care of neurotics of the gentler sex — an institution which should claim the attention of the medical profession not alone of

Chicago, but of the Central West in general.

Bellevue Place offers those essentials of absolute rest, the charm and stillness of a natural haven, and the considerate and intelligent care of those whose lifework is to smooth down the ruffled edges of mental turmoil and restore a weakened body to physiological action. It cannot be held that the advantage to the patient under the influences of a rest retreat

is brought about by superior or particular medication, or even medical attention, but rather from the situation and the careful conduct of the place of treatment, together with that gentle regulation which is not severe, but on the contrary is at once and in itself delightful to the worn body and mind.

Bellevue Place was founded wisely and well by the late Dr. R. J. Patterson, almost thirty years ago, and its history from the first is but a story of



BELLEVUE PLACE—MAIN BUILDING.

the highest success. From its portals many have gone out filled almost with a new life.

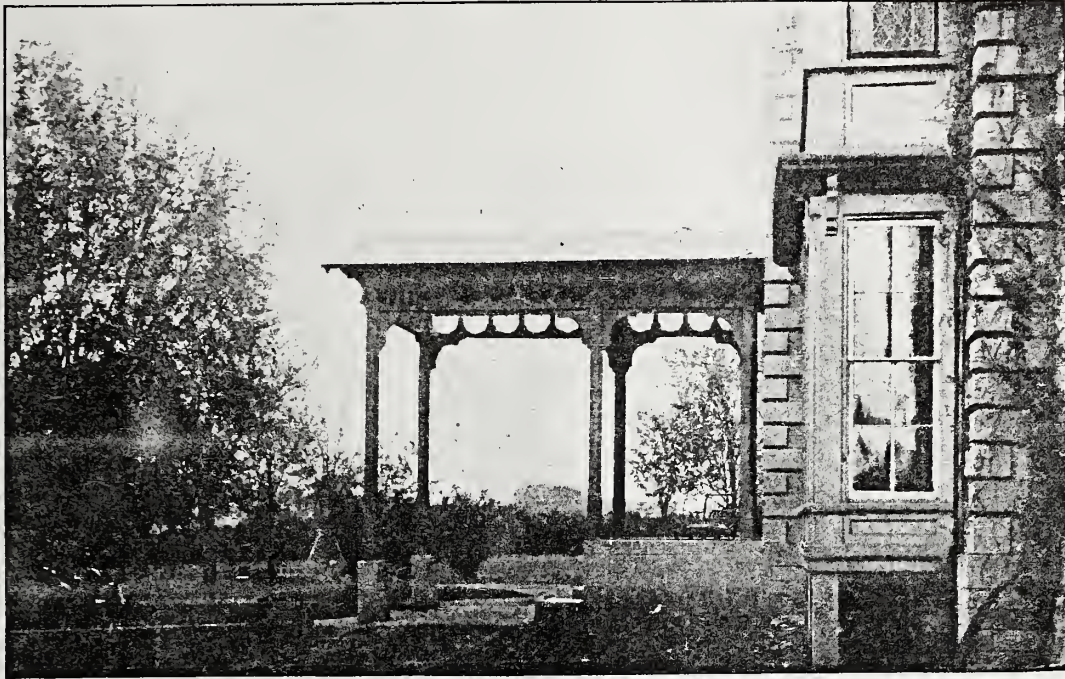
Beautifully situated in the midst of noble trees, with a lawn sprinkled with flowers and broken with winding walks and driveways, the building speaks, almost at once, its mission. The rough stone walls are quite cov-

ered with well-trained, creeping vines, save where the large windows flood the interior with sunlight. Around about are hammocks and lawn têtes which speak of out-door life and freedom. There are long, low hothouses whose roofs cover more than forty thousand square feet of surface. Here the year around the choicest products

of floriculture abound in profusion. Probably nowhere in this climate are more perfect or more fragrant roses grown than are found in the gardens of Bellevue Place. Altogether there are sixteen acres in this property, a small portion being given to the raising of vegetables, which in season supply the table of the institution.



BELLEVUE PLACE—A SIDE VIEW.



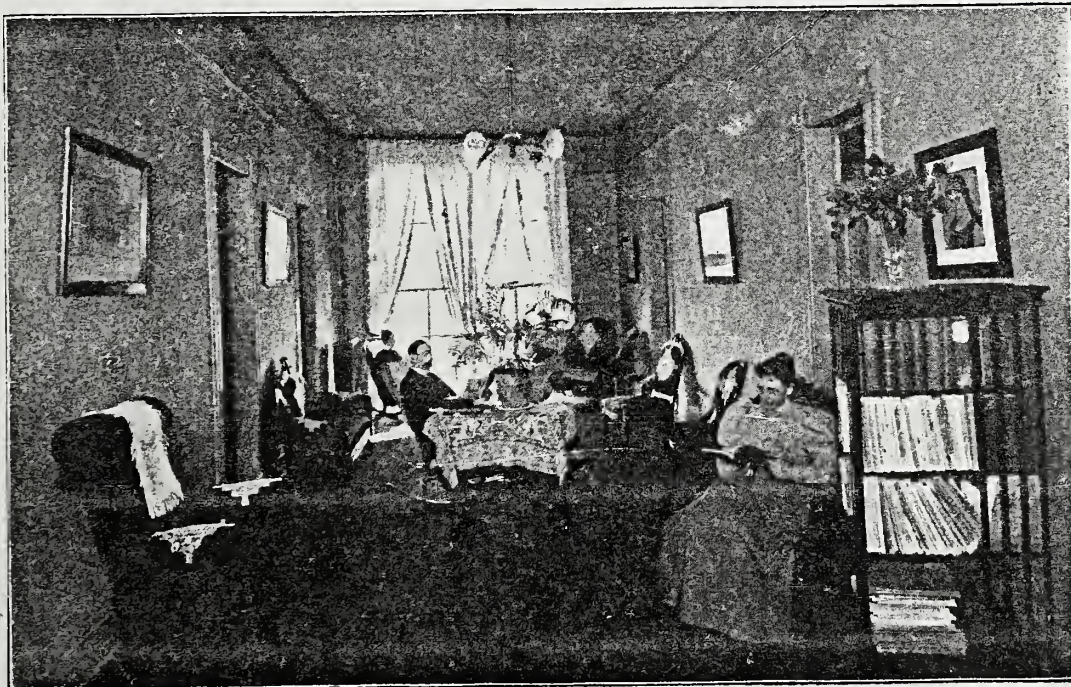
BELLEVUE PLACE—PORCH AND LAWN.

As to the building, it is commodious, extraordinarily so—a stone structure of three stories and basement. The particular features are very wide halls, the full length of the building without crooks or turns; very high ceilings; large and thoroughly well lighted rooms; a fine system of ventilation, electric lighting and steam

heating; pleasant and homelike furnishings and surroundings. In the management there is care and wise supervision. This was always the case under Dr. Patterson; it has continued now under Dr. F. H. Daniels and his aids. Dr. Daniels' entire professional life has been devoted to the study and care of mental diseases, he

having spent the last ten years in Worcester Lunatic Hospital, a large part of the time in charge of the female department.

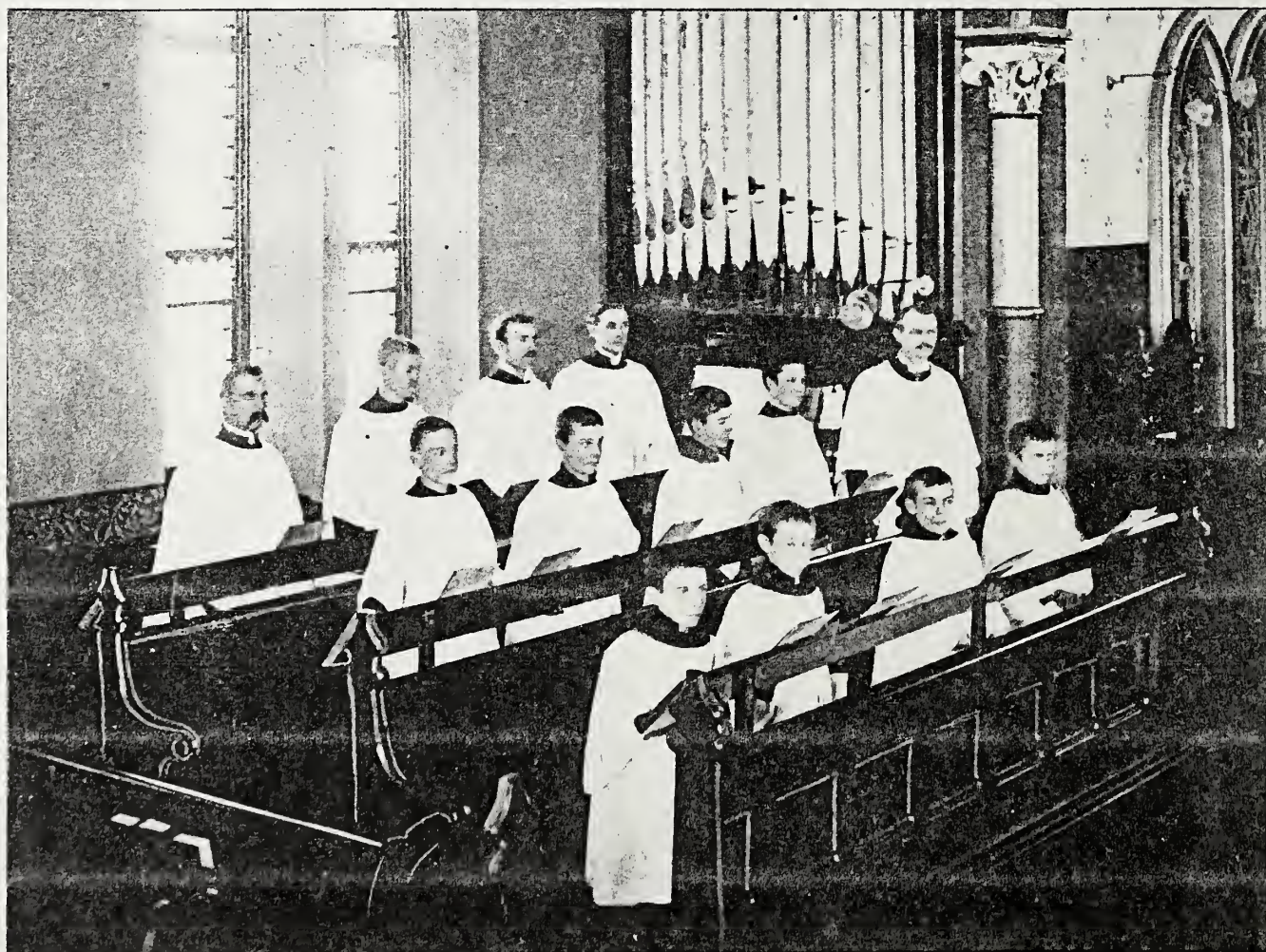
Dr. E. E. Whitehorne, the assistant physician, has had nine years of asylum experience in New York, Iowa and Illinois. Mr. S. A. Wolcott is secretary and treasurer of the company.



BELLEVUE PLACE—AN INTERIOR.



BELLEVUE PLACE—THE ORCHARD.



CHOIR OF CALVARY CHURCH.

Mary Lincoln's Christmas in Chicago

Chicago Sunday Tribune BOOKS Dec 2 1951

By Stefan Lorant

[Author of "The Presidency"]

Christmas day, 1874, was a wretched one for Mary Lincoln. Almost 10 years had gone by since she had lost her husband, but the memory of that tragic night at Ford's theater was still fresh in her soul. She was alone in her little hotel room in Florida; low in spirit, without friends, and still mourning the death of her son, Tad.

She was haunted by strange visions. Frightened and bewildered, her thoughts flew to Chicago, where her only surviving son, Robert, was living. For weeks she had been wondering and worrying, her mind heavy with dark images. Then, when she could not bear it any longer, she telegraphed the family doctor and her son that she was coming to Chicago. Both the doctor and Robert asked her to stay in Florida, but Mary, caught in her hallucinations, had boarded a train at Jacksonville and was racing northward.

Upon her arrival she refused to go to Robert's house, but took lodging at the Grand Pacific hotel and begged Robert to stay with her. She passed her first night in nervous trepidation. Every now and then she would tap at her son's door, only to speak a few words and hear his answer. The following morning she ran, clad only in her nightgown, to the elevator, and, when Robert tried to lead her back, she screamed: "You are going to murder me."

One day, when she was calmer, she went out shopping and spent a huge sum for things for which she had no use. She paid for three watches, \$450; for jewelry, \$700; for soaps and perfumes, \$200; and she bought 17 pairs of gloves, three dozen handkerchiefs, a num-

ber of lace curtains, a great amount of sashes and ribbons.

Robert was driven to desperation. What should he do with her? He consulted old friends, and they advised him that she would best be taken care of in an institution. So Mary Lincoln was brought to



Mary Todd Lincoln

trial and, after the testimony of witnesses, the jury decided that she was "to be sent to the State Hospital for the Insane."

The day after the "insanity hearing" she sneaked away from her room and, rushing to the nearby drugstore, demanded some laudanum and camphor. Recognizing her, the druggist told her to return for the drugs in half an hour's time. Mary next tried the Grand Pacific drug store, where she was given a bottle of colored camphor water labelled "Laudanum and Camphor." As soon as she reached the street she swallowed the contents. Then she returned to the store and asked for some more. Again the concoction was given to her and once more she drank it. She had no desire to live any more.

Robert, quickly summoned, consulted with the doctors and a few

hours later Mary Lincoln was taken to the private sanitarium of Dr. R. J. Patterson at Batavia.

For ten whole weeks she was in the institution, all the time fighting for her release, bombarding friends with letters. Finally she was allowed to leave. She went to Springfield to stay with her sister.

The house to which she returned was the same one where 33 years before she had married Abraham Lincoln—a house of happy and blissful memories.

There she lowered the curtains in her room; daylight hurt her eyes. There, between candlelight and shadows, she spent another Christmas, desperate and bitter against the world.

In the spring her case was reopened. This time the jury declared that "Mary Lincoln is restored to reason and is capable to manage her estate."

Once again she was free. Once again she had command of her money. What was she to do?

She sailed for Europe, hiding out, putting the ocean between her and her former life.

For a while she stayed in France; then, with cold weather coming on, she moved to Italy. Robert did not know where she was. With her other friends she communicated little.

Christmas came, another one, and once more she endured it alone in her lonely hotel room. If she looked thru her window she could see the sea; she could ponder and wonder. Thousands of miles away the waves dashed against the reefs of her homeland, where once she had been the First Lady, where once she had a loving husband and where three of her sons now were buried.

Outside her room voices sang of Christmas and the birth of Jesus; inside her the voices spoke of hopelessness and death.

"Life is indeed a heavy burden, and I do not care how soon I am called hence," she wrote to a friend. She had nothing to look forward to. She once revealed her innermost thoughts when she said: "In this great trial, it is difficult to be taught resignation. The only comfort that remains to us is the blessed consolation that our beloved ones are rejoicing in their Heavenly Home, free from all earthly trials and in the holy presence of God and his angels, and are singing the praises of the

Redeemer. I pray God to grant me sufficient grace to await His time, for I long to be at rest. Without my idolized husband, I do not wish to remain on earth."

So she prayed once, so she prayed on this Christmas, so she lived the rest of her life.

Anne Kelley is a free lance writer.

An Historian Objects

EDITOR,
MAGAZINE OF BOOKS:

In my opinion, "The Trial of Mrs. Abraham Lincoln," by Homer Croy, recently published by Duell, Sloan & Pearce, grossly distorts established fact. Yet several reviewers have already accepted the book at face value, even tho the author offers no documentation for what is at least a novel thesis other than the general statement that he has followed, "for the most part," the story as the Chicago newspapers reported it.

Croy starts out with this assertion: "The reason the story of the sanity trial of Mary Todd Lincoln has never been told in factual form is that the legal papers were destroyed, and it was almost impossible to come by the facts. Even the docket number of the case disappeared. The shorthand notes taken by the court stenographers disappeared, as well as all loose papers."

The facts are that the docket number of the case has not disappeared; the complete file is in the records of the Probate Court of Cook county, Illinois, where it may be consulted with the permission of the probate judge; no official stenographic record was made.

Chicago newspapers had reporters present, and published detailed reports of the proceedings

and testimony. These reports prove that Mrs. Lincoln was not put on the witness stand, and sat in silence during the taking of testimony. Yet Croy has her on the stand, and devotes 15 pages to her examination and cross-examination.

In the course of this narration, he even has her testifying on such irrelevancies as the Ann Rutledge affair, Lincoln's alleged failure to show up at his wedding, the veracity of William H. Herndon, and the authorship of the Bixby letter—testimony which any lawyer knows would never have been permitted even if she had been on the stand.

Croy's characterizations of Leonard Swett, who represented Robert Lincoln at the trial; M. R. M. Wallace, the presiding judge; and Lyman J. Gage, foreman of the jury, are outrageous.

Duell, Sloan & Pearce, on the jacket, describes the trial of Mrs. Lincoln as "a shocking miscarriage of justice." Am I hopelessly old fashioned in contending that a book which embodies what I believe to be flagrant perversions of the record is a shocking miscarriage of history?

PAUL M. ANGLE

Director,
Chicago Historical Society

Paul Angle is a noted
Lincoln scholar, and
author.

Chicago Sunday Tribune



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See actual journal (citation on back) for the whole article which includes RTL's visits.

RODNEY A. ROSS

*Mary Todd Lincoln, Patient
At Bellevue Place, Batavia*

Rodney A. Ross grew up in Batavia, Illinois, where his father, Dr. Edward Ross, operated Bellevue Place Sanitarium from 1946 to 1964. The author was graduated from Knox College in 1965 and received his M.A. degree in history from the University of Chicago the following year. He held a National Teaching Fellowship at Wilberforce University, Wilberforce, Ohio, during the 1967-1968 academic year, was an instructor in history there in 1967-1969 and currently is again a graduate student of the University of Chicago. The author's text relates the events preceding and during Mrs. Lincoln's stay at Bellevue Place in 1875.

THE NAME Bellevue Place, when used by American newspapers in 1875, referred not to a fashionable hotel but rather to an exclusive sanitarium or, to use the language of the day, an insane asylum. Dr. Richard J. Patterson, formerly medical superintendent of the Indiana and then the Iowa state hospitals for the insane, had several years earlier purchased the building and grounds of a private academy in Batavia, Illinois, thirty-five miles west of Chicago, for use as a sanitarium. There, in June, 1875, Dr. Patterson was caring for approximately twenty patients, all women. One was Abraham Lincoln's widow.

Earlier that year Mary Todd Lincoln had been living alone in Florida. On March 12 she telegraphed the Lincoln family's Chicago physician, Dr. Ralph N. Isham, that she believed her sole surviving son, thirty-one-year-old Robert Todd Lincoln, to be ill and in need of his mother. Several hours later she was on a train bound for Chicago. But it was the mother, not the son, who was ill. Indeed, Mrs. Lincoln's "mental impairment" probably dated back to

Was Mrs. Lincoln really insane?

Two hospitalization theories

By NICK DAGGER

BATAVIA — There are two theories to explain why, 100 years ago this week, Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of one of this country's most beloved leaders, was declared insane.

One theory is sympathetic with her family and friends and paints a picture of a woman fraught with problems in the 10 years after husband's assassination. This theory holds that placing Mary Todd Lincoln in a sanitarium was necessary.

A second theory, however, argues that the whole episode is one of the most diabolical conspiracies ever concocted in the history of American politics.

Whichever theory is correct, on May 20, 1875, Mary Todd Lincoln stepped off the train at the Batavia depot, boarded a carriage and rode the short distance to Bellevue Place, a hospital for wealthy women with mental or emotional problems.

The building that was to be the former Mrs. Lady's home for some four months, had been built in the 1850's as a private school.

It was run by a Dr. Richard J. Patterson and had an excellent reputation for providing "... modern management of mental disease by rest, diet, baths, fresh air, occupation, diversion, change of scene, no more medicine than ... absolutely necessary, and the least possible restraint."

The sanitarium occupied 18 acres on the southwest edge of the village. Besides Patterson and his wife and son, a dozen nurses and attendants cared for the 20 residents of Bellevue Place.

Mrs. Lincoln spent her days there quietly and ate most of her meals with the Pattersons or alone in her room.

If the 3,000 Batavia residents of the day saw the wife of the Great Emancipator at all it was during one of her infrequent supervised carriage rides about the town.

Once each week her eldest son, Robert Todd Lincoln, would journey out from Chicago to visit her.

Those regular visits, more than anything, undoubtedly stirred Mrs. Lincoln to actively seek her release from Bellevue Place just two months after she was placed there.

It had been Robert, her only living son, who had taken the steps to have her declared insane.

Both theories of the case agree that Robert Todd Lincoln acted in what he thought were his mother's best interests when he arranged for the trial on May 19, 1875, in Chicago, that would find her insane.

Most historians point to the many tragedies in Mary Todd Lincoln's life as evidence that she was unstable, and, they say, in need of the services of a place such as the hospital in Batavia.

She had lost three sons, watched in horror as her husband was gunned down in her arms, and, sub-

sequently suffered humiliation at the hands of the rumor mill of the day which had it that Ann Rutledge, and not she, had been the great love in Abraham Lincoln's life.

A handful of historians hold to the theory that the insanity hearing of Mary Todd Lincoln was actually a conspiracy to wreck the political future of Robert Lincoln.

Key Republicans, led by Judge David Davis and Leonard Swett, opposed then President U.S. Grant, disturbed by the corruption of his administration.

A supporter of Grant, Robert Lincoln by himself posed little threat, but the Lincoln name was magic.

There was no way that the name of the martyr Abraham Lincoln could be attacked, the conspiracy theorists argue, so Grant's opponents in the Republican party manufactured the insanity trial of Mrs. Lincoln.

The trial itself was held in Chicago on the afternoon of May 19, 1875.

Judge Davis presided and Swett was prosecutor. Testimony lasted only a few hours; the jury rendered its verdict in a few minutes.

The next morning, papers of the day reported, Mary Todd Lincoln made an unsuccessful attempt to poison herself.

From her Chicago hotel she rode the train to Batavia.

From there she waged a letter campaign denouncing Robert and demanding her own release.

On Sept. 10, 1875, her demands for release were met and she went to Springfield to live with her sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Ninian Edwards.

Upon her release Robert Todd Lincoln returned his mother's estate to her along with an accurate accounting of how he had handled it during her stay in Batavia.

On June 15, 1876, a new hearing was held in Chicago. This time Swett defended Mrs. Lincoln and after a four-minute trial, she was declared restored to sanity.

That same day James G. Blaine, a staunch supporter of President Grant, lost the Republican nomination to Ohio Governor Rutherford B. Hayes.

Conspiracy or not, the trial of Mary Todd Lincoln marked the political downfall of her son Robert.

The stigma of the struggle with his mother never left him, and, although once considered to have a chance to succeed his father in the White House, Robert Todd Lincoln had to content himself with a cabinet post under President Chester Arthur.

After her final court victory, Mary Todd Lincoln left the United States for four years of self-imposed exile in Europe.

She returned to America in 1880. At the age of 61 at her sister's home in Springfield, on July 15, 1882, Mary Todd Lincoln died.



Bellevue Place

Turning off of Batavia Avenue and heading west on Union Avenue, one's vision is almost immediately commanded by an old stone building looming straight ahead. This building, now being refurbished as a modern dwelling with multiple units, casts Batavia in a most poignant and dramatic role on the stage of American history. For four months during the summer of 1875, the ghost of Abraham Lincoln, our greatest president, ten years after his assassination, must surely have brooded over this stone building. During those four months his widow, Mary Todd Lincoln, shattered in heart and mind by a series of wrenching sorrows, was given care and rest in this building, a sanitarium, known as Bellevue Place.

Mary Todd Lincoln was a casualty of the fratricidal holocaust known as the American Civil War. Born in Kentucky with several members of her family fighting on the side of the Confederacy, she knew, during those war years, little inner peace. Often branded as a traitor to the Union, severely criticized for her impetuous style as First Lady of the White House and crushed by the death of her son, Willie, in the White House in the dreadful winter of 1862, Mary Todd Lincoln became erratic and emotionally distraught. Then on that awful, fateful night, she went with her beloved husband to Ford's Theater. It was Good Friday, April 14, 1865. With the war drawing to a close, she and her husband sought a bit of healing laughter in a second-rate comedy. But when John Wilkes Booth stealthily slipped through the door of the presidential box and fired a fatal shot into the brain of the great president, the sound to Mrs. Lincoln was a thunderous calamity.

Following that black night in Ford's Theater her disintegration became an illness. As though she had not

suffered enough, her soul was further oppressed by the death of another beloved son, Tad, in 1871. In that summer of 1875 she came to Chicago, broken and bewildered. Her emotional and mental disintegration was so evident that her only remaining child, Robert Todd Lincoln, a Chicago attorney, sought help in a court of law. On May 19, a twelve-person jury delivered a verdict of insanity. On the following afternoon, May 20, 1875, she was brought to Bellevue Place in Batavia. There she remained until September 10, 1875, when she was taken to Springfield and released to the custody of her sister, Mrs. Ninian (Elizabeth) Edwards. In the Edwards' home she and Abraham had been married on November 4, 1842.

Those who cherish the thrill of exploring American history can be grateful that Bellevue Place has been protected and preserved. It was first built as a private academy in 1854. Known as Batavia Institute, its stone work was quarried from rock formations in the area. It was built through the efforts of Elijah S. Town, D.K. Town, John Van Nortwick, Joel McKee, and the Rev. Stephen Peet. The Educational Law of 1855 soon made schools like this unnecessary.

In 1867 the Batavia Institute became Bellevue Place, a rest home and sanitarium operated by Dr. R.J. Patterson. In 1887 Bellevue Place came under the management of a private corporation.

In 1945 Bellevue Place was sold to Dr. Edward Ross who continued to operate it as a sanitarium until his death in 1964. Upon his death the building was closed.

In 1965 Bellevue Place became the Fox Hill Home, a refuge for young, unwed mothers. Fox Hill Home was closed in June, 1979.



Further information about Bellevue Place during the time of Mrs. Lincoln's residence is in *The Insanity File: The Case of Mary Todd Lincoln*, by Mark E. Neely, Jr. and Gerald McMurtry [Southern Illinois University Press], available October, 1986. The authors are renowned Lincoln scholars. The book has the benefit of records and materials newly available to scholars and brims with heretofore unknown and unpublished facts about Bellevue Place.

Mrs. Lincoln's Bellevue Place bedroom as it is displayed in the Batavia Depot Museum.

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Historical Data-

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Batavia Depot Museum

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Bellevue Place
(Now called
Landmark Manor)



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Bellevue Place

Batavia, Illinois

S&L property sale proves historic

By Karl Plath

Buried in more than 2,000 pages of listings of properties available from failed savings and loans nationwide are two Chicago-area treasures: a historic gem and a diamond in the rough.

The gem is a 136-year-old former mental institution that once housed Mary Todd Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's widow, during a dark period in her life.

And showing promise is a once-splendid mansion on Chicago's South Side that was home to a wealthy family during the glory years of the neighborhood 100 years ago.

The two buildings are among 34 properties in the Chicago area in the "Real Estate Asset Inventory," a four-volume listing of more than 30,000 properties nationwide that the federal Resolution Trust Corp. wants to sell as part of the savings and loan industry bailout.

In the Chicago area, except for the two historic buildings, the listing has caused little stir among potential buyers.

Batavia Mayor Jeff Schielke, however, is enthusiastic over Bellevue Place, the former mental institution that had fallen into near ruin and had been taken over by a savings and loan association after two failed attempts at renovation.

"It's a piece of architecture that I'd like to think will be here 100 years from now," Schielke said of the three-story limestone building. Originally a college, it became one of the modern mental institutions of its day and was home to Mary Todd Lincoln for six months in 1875.

The structure, at 333 Jefferson St., Batavia, stands at the end of a long canopy of 100-year-old elm trees flanking Union Avenue, which had been named during the Civil War era to reflect Batavia's strong abolitionist posture.

"The building has very strong historical significance," said Schielke, who is a member and past president of the Batavia Historical Society.

The mayor, also a co-author of the recent revision of Batavia's history, said the



Tribune photo by Michael Budrys

Batavia Mayor Jeff Schielke is well aware of the significance of Bellevue Place, the former mental institution once

home to Mary Todd Lincoln. The asking price has not been set, but this property sold for \$1.78 million in 1985.

building long has been of interest to history buffs.

"I have people come to my office who are from all parts of the country who come to Batavia just because they're interested in this historical saga of Mary Lincoln's insanity issue," Schielke said. "They come here to research it."

Until its current incarnation as an 14-

unit apartment complex, the building most recently had been the Fox Hill Home, a residential shelter for unwed mothers. That institution moved out during the late 1970s.

An architectural firm had bought the building with plans to turn it into a senior citizens complex, but that project was aborted after strong resistance from neigh-

bors.

A developer then purchased the property, which includes a five-acre lot, in the early 1980s and planned to renovate it into apartments and a planned-unit development that would have included an additional 40 units of attached housing to be built on the grounds. That venture failed,

See Sale, pg. 1C

Sale

Continued from page 1

Schielke said, and the now-defunct First Savings of America, which had provided financing, took over the property.

Finally, the apartments and five of the additional units were completed in 1986 by local developer Richard Ward, of R.J. Ward Construction, under contract to First Savings of America. Schielke said the planned unit development approved by the city would allow for completion of the additional 35 units.

"I have had several calls from developers about the building, asking if they could complete the planned unit development and whether we would allow some modifications, such as fewer and larger units at a higher price," Schielke said.

"We're open, but we would like to preserve the ambience of the front yard of the place.

"The city is anxious to preserve the building and strengthen the values and character of the neighborhood. It would definitely be developed as a residential property."

Schielke said the building is in the midst of an upscale neighborhood that includes many Victorian, Queen Anne and Greek revival residences built during the mid-19th Century. There also has been considerable new construction in the area.

"The market-value history of the neighborhood indicates it would support a nice product," Schielke said. "The value and attraction is there for people to buy it. It's in a prime area for development."

Schielke, a real estate appraiser by profession, said homes in the area range in value to well over \$200,000.

During the four to five years the building was vacant, the property had become overgrown with weeds and the building had been the target of vandals, Schielke said.

"It became a point of great concern to the city because it was not being maintained.... The windows were falling out, children were breaking in. At one point the fire department went down there and found evidence that five separate arson fires had been started but had burned themselves out."

Schielke said the significance of the building, besides its classic institutional architecture, lies in the period of Mary Todd Lincoln's stay.

"There was an insanity trial on her, which her son Robert oversaw, because she was seeing clairvoyants and psychics and giving her money away... doing what was considered strange things," Schielke said. "They had her committed to this particular institution, which was looked upon at the time as one of the better institutions of its type."

"Apparently her stay was a fairly pleasant one as far as her rehabilitation. But as an interesting sidebar, one of the unusual things, according to some of the notes of the doctors, was that she complained about the noise in the neighborhood."

Schielke said local historians initially were baffled by Mrs. Lincoln's complaint until they realized that the former limestone quarry was only two blocks away.

"That was in 1875, four years after the Chicago Fire," Schielke said. "The need for Batavia limestone was at its height in 1875 because there was such a need coming out of the City of Chicago.... Many people wanted to rebuild out of stone. Batavia was in a boom time then, but she was upset by the noise."

The city has transformed the quarry into a swimming pool in what is now known as Quarry Park.

"The building has significant historical presence within our town," said Schielke, noting that the furniture once used by Mary Todd Lincoln is on display in the local museum.

"It [the building] is architecturally significant and has a presence that anchors the neighborhood and the historic homes that surround it."

"If we appreciate the Lincoln saga and the history of the building today, I think future generations will appreciate it even more."

A spokesman for the Resolution Trust Corp. said the asking price for property has not been determined. But, according to the Batavia Township assessor's office, the property sold for \$1.78 million in 1985.

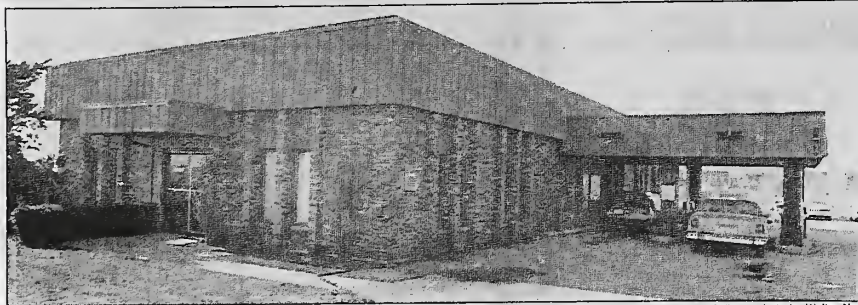
Also providing a link to Chicago's past is a 100-year-old former mansion at 4812 S. Vincennes Ave., in the Kenwood neighborhood. The approximately 4,000-square-foot, three-story graystone, however, has been vacant for several years, and the rear of the upper floor was gutted by fire about two years ago.

"But it has a beautiful exterior," said Richard C. Johnson, a real estate broker with ERA Sack Realty in Hyde Park. "It's a magnificent structure."

"It's how Chicago and its inhabitants lived at one time and has all the markings of what could once again be a beautiful building. The inner front door is of magnificent carved wood. When you walk through it, you say, 'I'm in the house of gentry here.'"

Tom Kavanaugh, general mana-

Chicago Tribune, Sunday, February 4, 1990 W



Tribune photo by Walter Neal

The Resolution Trust Corp. is selling the assets of insolvent savings and loan associations. One of them is the former Orland Park branch of the First Savings Bank of America.

ger of Henry & Sons Construction, which specializes in renovating older buildings, has expressed interest in the property because of its classic architecture and historic value. He said his research indicates that it was built in the early 1890s by a family named Mowatt, probably a wealthy merchant family.

"Whoever owned that house was a wealthy man," Kavanaugh said. "The outside is classic, but inside there's not a lot to be saved." He noted that a large ballroom is located on the third floor.

Kavanaugh said the building would have to be gutted and rebuilt, although he said the hardwood floors probably could be saved. Between the fire and vandalism, he said some of the interior wood trim has been destroyed or lost, but much of what remains is ornately detailed. The back half of the roof is gone.

"It would be an interesting project," he said. "You'll never get that kind of housing stock. It's in-

credible."

Kavanaugh said the building probably would make the most economic sense for an individual planning to live in it and turn it into a three-unit building that would include a 2,000-square-foot owner's residence and two 2,000-square-foot apartments.

He estimated the cost of renovation to be at least \$160,000. But he said special loans available for owner-occupied homes and tax credits could make it economically feasible for an individual. The building is on an oversized city lot, about 40 feet wide and 150 feet deep.

"For someone a little bit adventuresome, economically it's not a bad deal," Kavanaugh said.

"When you see one of these buildings, in a sense you say, 'That's life.' But you hate to see these old houses go."

Commonwealth Federal Savings Association of Houston, the owner of the building, is asking \$22,000 for it.

Aside from the Batavia and Kenwood buildings, real estate agents and officials from the failed savings and loans and the Resolution Trust Corp. said that the listing of available properties has caused little excitement in the area.

In Chicago, the available properties run the gamut from a small studio condominium on the North Side to a vacant branch facility of the former First Savings of America in Orland Park. About two-thirds of the properties are owned by out-of-state thrifts, mostly from Texas.

Many of the properties are tied up in legal actions, either through disputed ownership or federally mandated appraisal procedures, and may not be available for sale for months, if ever.

The Resolution Trust Corp., formed last summer under jurisdiction of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., is charged with disposing of the assets of 281 insolvent thrifts under its control.

In the Chicago area these include Concordia Federal Savings Bank in

What's available

These are the Chicago-area properties in the "Real Estate Asset Inventory," a four-volume listing of more than 30,000 properties nationwide that the federal Resolution Trust Corp. wants to sell as part of the savings and loan industry bailout.

| Address | Municipality |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Single-family homes | |
| 6 W. Fernwood St. | Bolingbrook |
| 225 W. 156th Pl. | Calumet City |
| 1801 McCormick Lane | Hanover Park |
| 105 Nicholson St. | Joliet |
| 1418 Cornelius St. | Joliet |
| 2101 Midhurst Lane | Joliet |
| 518 Water St. | Joliet |
| 202 S. 4th Ave. | Maywood |
| 508 Bonnie Brae Pl. | River Forest |
| 37503 N. Terrace Lane | Spring Grove |
| 10640 S. Prairie Ave. | Chicago |
| 11054 Avenue A | Chicago |
| 207 N. Austin Ave. | Chicago |
| 23 E. 120th Pl. | Chicago |
| 231 W. 108th Pl. | Chicago |
| 2417 E. 73rd St. | Chicago |
| 2744 W. Lexington St. | Chicago |
| 3547 W. Evergreen Ave. | Chicago |
| 4281 W. Ford City Dr., Unit C2-504 | Chicago |
| 4812 S. Vincennes Ave. | Chicago |
| 505 W. Melrose St., Unit 209 | Chicago |
| 5143 S. Kenwood Ave. | Chicago |
| 6520 S. Carpenter Ave. | Chicago |
| 6623 S. Claremont Ave. | Chicago |
| 7018-20 S. Darnell Ave. | Chicago |
| 7357 S. May St. | Chicago |
| Multifamily buildings | |
| 8372 S. Baker Ave. | Chicago |
| 7547 W. 61st St. | Summit |
| 333 Jefferson St. | Batavia |
| 1606 S. St. Louis Ave. | Batavia |
| 96 E. 156th St. | Harvey |

Also available are an office building, the Orland Park Branch, First Savings of America, 15600 S. La Grange Rd., Orland Park; and this land, 3,402 square feet at 10833 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, and 45 acres at U.S. Highway 30 and Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village.

Lansing, Skokie Federal Savings and Loan Association, Home Federal Savings and Loan in Joliet, Libertyville Federal Savings and Loan and First Savings of America in Orland Park.

MARY LINCOLN'S "SUICIDE ATTEMPT": A PHYSICIAN RECONSIDERS THE EVIDENCE.

By Norbert Hirschhorn, MD

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Norbert Hirschhorn is a physician specializing in the public health of women, children, and communities in the USA and the Third World. He has published essays on the health and history of Emily Dickinson, Mary Todd Lincoln, and an essay providing evidence for medicinal mercury poisoning of Abraham Lincoln.*

INTRODUCTION

"I propose through the hasty though diffuse mode of dictation to give you the circumstances attendant upon the commission of Mrs. Lincoln to the insane asylum." So begins Lincoln's political operative and lawyer Leonard Swett's report to Judge David Davis, executor of Abraham Lincoln's estate.¹ Upon application of her son Robert, a Chicago court was to decide if Mary Todd Lincoln was insane and in need of a conservator; it was believed that her increasingly erratic and delusional behavior put at risk the nearly \$60,000 she now carried on her person. On May 19th, 1875, after a hearing lasting several hours, the jurors found in Robert's favor, and that she was "a fit person to be sent to a State Hospital for the Insane."²

The next afternoon, according to contemporary sources, hours before she was to be taken to Bellevue Place (a privately owned sanitarium in Batavia, Illinois), Mary Todd Lincoln bluffed and bullied her way past

several persons guarding her at the Grand Pacific Hotel, and visited three pharmacies seeking laudanum (alcoholic tincture of opium) mixed with camphor. The first druggist, alarmed and suspicious, prepared instead burnt sugar in water, which she immediately downed.

This brief article examines five questions: Did the episode occur? What happened? Did Mary Lincoln have a legitimate reason to ask for laudanum and camphor? If the preparation had actually contained laudanum, would she have been in danger? And finally, was her precipitate swallowing of the potion an attempt at suicide?

Did the episode occur?

Among Lincoln biographers a sharp division of opinion exists. Neely and McMurty give the story generally as told in newspaper articles the next day.³ Jean Baker, however, claims that "this story was probably false," spread by a newspaper owned by son Robert Lincoln's former law partner; "more a son's exculpation of filial treachery,"⁴ for the whole insanity trial, "than a mother's demonstration of suicidal tendencies."⁵ There are two main sources for the story, which the biographers cite: Swett's report, and detailed newspaper accounts in *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Chicago Times*,



Mary Todd's supposed "insanity" may have actually been due to the chronic pain she endured as a result of a host of medical conditions of which she was victim. Her erratic and bizarre behavior was most likely the result of her suffering on a daily basis and from which she could find little relief from the discomfort.

Photo Courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum
Harrogate, Tennessee

and *The Daily Inter-Ocean*. The particularity of the narratives lends credibility to the story; but so do interesting if minor differences in the details, which indicate no single origin for the reports. Clearly, something serious happened.

Swett was already deeply concerned about Mrs. Lincoln's precarious mental state. In his report to Davis he recounted this exchange with Mrs. Lincoln, who wanted to change clothes before going to the courtroom: " 'And why won't you leave me alone for a moment?' she said. ['] Because if I do Mrs. Lincoln I am afraid you will jump out of the window. [']" Not only had Swett to assemble the entire case and prepare the witnesses for the sensational trial, he was responsible for bringing her to court, by force if necessary. This unnerved him: "The matter of her custody was a worse question, and to my mind presented more real terrors than anything I have ever undertaken. To have advanced on a battery instead would, it seems

to me, have been real relief." In addition, he was answerable for her security before removal to the sanitarium, and for the retrieval by any means the nearly \$60,000 in cash and negotiable bonds she had pinned to her undergarments (which, finally, she yielded peaceably). Thus when she escaped her watchers, obtained and drank what she thought was laudanum, Swett could only tremble in his concluding remarks to Judge Davis, "It is perfectly frightful to think how near she came to poisoning herself."⁶

What happened?

According to the accounts and their variations, Mary Lincoln—always a formidable presence—escaped a maid and two men, a Pinkerton detective and a "stalwart darky," by "plausible stories."⁷ The guards had been posted since the day before to keep her safely in her room at the Grand Pacific Hotel on

Clark Street until she could be brought to the sanitarium,⁸ but the watchers were instructed "in no case to lay hands on her or to offer her any violence."⁹ She bolted downstairs to the Squair and Co. pharmacy on the ground floor. There she asked either for two ounces each of laudanum and camphor,¹⁰ or three ounces of the mixture.¹¹ She said she needed the medicine to massage into her "neuralgic" shoulder. The clerk and proprietor knew by whom they were confronted and became instantly suspicious. Buying time, they told Mrs. Lincoln to return in half an hour,¹² or ten minutes,¹³ whereupon she went across the street, or down the block,¹⁴ to the drugstore of Rogers and Smith at the corner of Adams and Clark Streets, on the same mission. She either went on foot, or by hired carriage,¹⁵ followed by Frank Squair (with the hapless Pinkerton man in tow¹⁶), who urgently signaled Smith not to comply. Mrs. Lincoln then proceeded one, or two more blocks¹⁷ to Dale's drug store on Clark Street, but by now Squair was ahead of her effecting another refusal. She returned to Squair's establishment, where Squair himself quickly prepared a solution of burnt sugar and water, which she drank on the spot.¹⁸ She went to her room but—and here the three newspaper accounts converge—some twenty minutes later descended again to Squair's asking for another ounce of laudanum, ostensibly because she found no relief of her pain. Now she insisted on watching the druggist make up the potion, but Squair told her the opiate was kept in the basement. He soon returned with another vial of caramel water, this time labeled "Laudanum - poison," which she again swallowed on the spot. Her son Robert and Swett, alerted by messenger soon after her escape, arrived on the scene at the tail-end of the excitement. Swett's report elides the specific details of the chase but is otherwise consistent with the newspaper accounts.

Neely and McMurty summarize the events mainly as told by *The Chicago Times*. Jean Baker, citing Swett, *The Chicago Times*, and *The*

Daily Inter-Ocean, remarkably denies the event ever took place: "What makes the newspaper story [sic] even more implausible is the suggestion that a fifty-six-year-old woman—stiff in limb and gait from arthritis and gout, readily identifiable in her widow's black, watched by three attendants, a sheriff's deputy, and a maid stationed in her room—could elude her guards, *walk three miles...and return again on foot* to her room just at the moment of her son's timely arrival and her removal to the asylum."¹⁹ [Emphases added.] None of these details comes from the contemporary sources cited; nothing in the published biographical literature indicates that Mrs. Lincoln ever had gout; and the street locations of the drug stores and the hotel are within one to two blocks of each other.²⁰

Did Mary Lincoln have a legitimate reason to ask for laudanum and camphor?

Mary Lincoln had more than "neuralgia," a non-specific term. My colleague Professor of Neurology Robert G. Feldman and I have demonstrated that Mrs. Lincoln suffered from a chronic and extremely painful neurologic disease of the spinal cord disease called "tabes dorsalis," brought on most likely by longstanding diabetes, and lasting until her death.²¹ The signs and symptoms of this disorder were precisely those adduced to convince the 1875 jurors, and many others who attended her, of her insanity. The stabbing, shooting, needling and burning pains typical of "tabes dorsalis" flashed through all parts of her body, including her shoulders, unpredictably and for variable lengths of time, as is typical of the condition. (In our paper we were able to trace her symptoms as far back as November 1869; a letter of hers to Jesse Kilgore DuBois recently published takes the course of illness back to at least mid-1868: "Tell your wife...that I intend to gather *all the needles* that are now running through my body, & send them to her, in a handsome, *European pincushion*." [Emphases in original].²²)

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Laudanum was popular among Victorians for many uses, including its application on the skin over painful limbs.²³ Medical formularies of the 19th century give recipes for liniments and plasters containing both laudanum and camphor.²⁴ Thus it was not unreasonable for Mary Lincoln to assure the druggists, "that she was troubled with neuralgia in her shoulder, and the pain was so often severe that she was impelled to seek relief by bathing it in the compound she ordered."²⁵ However, she *drank* the remedy.

If the "medicine" had actually contained laudanum, would she have been in danger?

It is important to distinguish what Mary Lincoln requested—one-and-a-half to two ounces (45-60 cc) each of laudanum and camphor—from the pharmacologic preparation called "camphorated tincture of opium," otherwise known as paregoric. In the recipe of a leading 19th century US pharmacopeia two ounces of paregoric contained 3.75 grains of opium or 244 milligrams; while two ounces of laudanum held 60 grains of opium (one grain per cc) or 3900 milligrams.²⁶ Jean Baker pronounced the two ounces of laudanum as "not a lethal dose." However, a fatal dose can be as little as five grains or 325 milligrams.²⁷ Had Squair's vial really contained two ounces of laudanum, Mary Todd Lincoln would have ingested twelve times the lethal dose and died within hours—Squair and his clerk were right to be worried—*unless* she was addicted to laudanum like the famed opium eaters of past centuries. Thomas de Quincey, for instance, tolerated up to 150 grains of laudanum a day, equivalent to 9800 milligrams of opium.²⁸

As a long-time sufferer from migraine as well as her spinal cord disease, surely Mrs. Lincoln would have been accustomed to some anodyne. There is at least anecdotal evidence that she was taking both laudanum and chloral hydrate around the time of the trial;²⁹ there is as well the impeachable testimony of Maria

Vance, the Lincolns' housekeeper in Springfield, that Mrs. Lincoln drank large quantities of paregoric.³⁰ No credible evidence exists, however, that she was ever habituated to the large amounts of laudanum necessary to avoid lethal poisoning.

Two facts testify strongly against addiction to laudanum, at least in 1875: There is no evidence that she experienced or was treated for withdrawal symptoms while in the sanitarium,³¹ which would have been severe. More important, no opium addict would mistake caramel for the bitter taste and smell of laudanum. Therefore, on to our last question:

Was her precipitate swallowing of the potions an attempt at suicide?

Opium, and its products, was a common agency of suicide in the mid-nineteenth century.⁷ Laudanum was easily accessible even from ethical purveyors without a physician's prescription, and could be downed impulsively and painlessly. An analogous situation today is suicide by drinking pesticides.³²

One does not know, finally, what was on Mrs. Lincoln's mind that spring afternoon standing in front of Grand Pacific Hotel. But the pain of her chronic illness, the undoubted post-traumatic reaction to the tenth anniversary of her husband's murder,³³ her public mortification during the hearing for insanity, the loss of her money and perceived betrayal by her son, and the prospect of incarceration, all sufficiently support the conclusion that her attempt was real, impulsive, but as a measure of her tenacity and strength of character, not to be repeated.

Acknowledgments

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Samuel A. Schreiner: Clearing Mary Lincoln's name

By Samuel A. Schreiner

Published 2:15 am PST Wednesday, February 22, 2006

DARIEN, Conn. - Presidents Day generally is reserved for honoring our presidents. But how about the wives of our presidents? And how about presidential wives who have been unfairly maligned over the years? In this regard, there is no better candidate for rehabilitation this holiday than Mary Todd Lincoln.

For years, authors and scholars have claimed that Mary Lincoln was insane. This is simply not true, and a file of documents found in 1975 in a closet in the Manchester, Vt., home of Mary Lincoln's son Robert proves it.

In 1875, Mary Todd Lincoln was declared insane by a jury and remanded to an asylum. The charge was brought by Robert, and he must have nursed a guilty conscience about it to keep a file, which reveals that the trial was a sham.

The proceeding was nevertheless an international sensation.

Although another, little-noted trial a year later set that verdict aside and declared Mary Lincoln sane, the damage had already been done. A mad Mary Lincoln conveniently validated the tales circulated by her enemies and critics, mostly men, from the time she arrived on the national stage as the vivacious consort of a sorely tried president and on through her years as the neglected widow of a martyr.

Of course, the first lady was an emotional volcano, prone to fiery eruption at sometimes inappropriate moments. An attractive woman with expensive tastes, she could be easy on the eye but hard on the budget. With a well-stocked mind and the nerve to speak it, she persuaded her husband to follow her advice in matters such as coveted appointments, and this infuriated the men around the president.

Out of fear of, or respect for, Abraham Lincoln's power, comment on his wife was muted until the assassin's bullet removed him from office and Mary Lincoln became fair game for the gossip mongers, who claimed that Abraham Lincoln's bouts of depression were caused by a lost love and a miserable life with a crazy woman.

The creator of the miserable marriage myth was Lincoln's longtime law partner in Springfield, Ill., William Herndon. In a lecture he gave shortly after the president's death, Herndon said that Lincoln had never loved his wife because his heart belonged to Ann Rutledge, a neighbor who died at age 22 and who some historians believe was courted by Lincoln. To claim, however, that her death would have rendered a man of Lincoln's will and intelligence unable to have a loving relationship with another person is absurd.

The untimely loss of loved ones was such a common fact of life in the 1800s that people simply had to learn how to cope and carry on.

In any event, Herndon is not a believable witness to what went on between the Lincolns. Because he was too fond of the bottle and, in Mary Lincoln's view, too uncouth, he wasn't welcome in the Lincoln household. As a result, he developed an abiding hatred and jealousy of Lincoln's wife.

Herndon also probably was put off by what he undoubtedly regarded as the unmanly ways by which Lincoln helped his wife. Lincoln was known to have greeted callers still wearing an apron, and he often was seen shepherding a quartet of rambunctious young sons through the streets to his office to give his wife respite.

Herndon found Lincoln's office visits with children in tow especially annoying. Lincoln let them get into everything, as he evidently did at home, and even Herndon would agree that the Lincoln marriage was compatible in one respect: Neither husband nor wife believed in disciplining their children.

People who were intimate with the Lincolns did not buy the Rutledge story or the rest of Herndon's charges. Emily Todd Helm, Mary Lincoln's half-sister, who lived for months in the couple's Springfield home while she was a teenager, considered them love birds. She reported that Mary Lincoln would run out to the street to greet her husband as he returned home, and they would enter the house hand-in-hand.

Their differences in temperament - she, for instance, was punctual and he careless of time - could lead to clashes, but Helm was impressed by the way they were resolved. Once when Mary Lincoln let loose her anger at her husband's arriving late for supper, he simply scooped her up in his arms and kissed her.

A frequent guest in the Lincolns' Springfield house was the Rev. James Smith, Mary Lincoln's Presbyterian pastor. Although Lincoln was not a churchgoer, he and the minister would spend hours by the fireside discussing religion and everything else under the sun.

When Lincoln went to Washington, Smith was appointed to a consulate in Scotland, where he read in a newspaper an account of Herndon's Rutledge lecture. Incensed, he wrote an open letter to Herndon that was published in the Dundee Advertiser.

Reprinted in the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune, the letter made the point that a law office was not a good vantage point from which to judge a man's home life. Declaring himself fortunate enough to have known the Lincolns well, Smith wrote that the president was a "faithful, loving and affectionate husband" who "was utterly incapable of withholding" love from his wife.

Mary Lincoln's enemies may have discounted Smith's testimony on the grounds that he was paying off a debt or piously upholding the sanctity of marriage. They would have a harder time shrugging off an address by Charles Sumner, the worldly and sophisticated senator from Massachusetts, during a debate in Congress about Mary's pension.

After establishing himself as well acquainted with the couple's home life in the White House, Sumner said, "Surely, the honorable members of the Senate must be weary of casting mud on the garments of the wife of Lincoln." The president "had all her love," he continued, and Lincoln loved her "as only his mighty heart could."

Unquestionably high-strung, Mary Lincoln was under a great deal of stress while she was living in the White House, especially when her son Willie died in 1862. After so many other stresses - the death of another son Eddie 12 years earlier, attacks on her extravagance, doubts of her loyalty because she had relatives fighting for the Confederacy - Willie's death was almost more than she could take.

According to people who question her sanity, she wailed so hard and so long that Lincoln led her over to a window, pointed out an insane asylum in the distance and threatened to take her there if she didn't stop.

The story is probably true and totally in character for Lincoln, who often tried to tease or startle his wife out of her funks. That it did no damage to the marriage was attested by a couple who took a carriage ride with the Lincolns April 14, 1865, hours before their visit to Ford's Theater. The war over, the president and the first lady were talking as happily as newlyweds of future plans like trips together to Paris for her and to California for him.

Lincoln's patience with his wife was apparently reciprocated by her patience with him when he slipped

away from her into one of his periods of melancholy or preoccupation with affairs of state.

Lincoln suffered recurring episodes of what would now be called depression from early childhood onward. In light of what we know today, an effort to link them to emotional disappointments rather than to a chemical imbalance seems quaint rather than scientific.

Mary Lincoln may have been difficult to live with, but she was not insane, and there's no question that the president loved her dearly.

"My wife was as handsome as when she was a girl," Lincoln once told a reporter. "And I, poor nobody then, fell in love with her, and what is more, have never fallen out."

Let's finally acknowledge that truth.

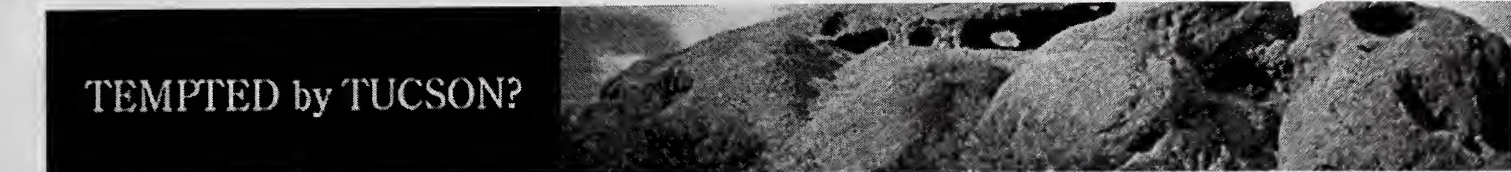
About the writer:

- Samuel A. Schreiner Jr. is the author of "The Trials of Mrs. Lincoln." His comments appeared in the New York Times.

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The Madness of Mary Lincoln

Her son had her committed. She said it was so he could get his hands on her money. Now, 130 years after this bitter and controversial drama, a trove of letters—long believed destroyed—sheds new light on it.

By Jason Emerson

In August 1875, after spending three months in a sanitarium in Batavia, Illinois, put there by her son against her will, Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of the martyred President, wrote: "It does not appear that God is good, to have placed me here. I endeavor to read my Bible and offer up my petitions three times a day. But my afflicted heart fails me and my voice often falters in prayer. I have worshipped my son and no unpleasant word ever passed between us, yet I cannot understand why I should have been brought out here."



President Lincoln's First Lady.
(Library of Congress)

This letter, along with 24 others, completely unknown and unpublished, was recently discovered in a steamer trunk owned by the children of Robert Todd Lincoln's attorney. They are known as the "lost" insanity letters of Mary Lincoln, and their discovery will forever rewrite this famous—and infamous—chapter in the Lincoln-family history.

The newly discovered letters document a long and intimate correspondence between Mary Lincoln and Myra and James Bradwell, Mary's legal advisers and the people most responsible for getting her out of the sanitarium. The letters were known to have existed. It was assumed Robert Lincoln burned them; he had admitted attempting to destroy all of his mother's correspondence from the insanity period.

Many historians have tried and failed to find the letters. The biographer W. A. Evans wrote in 1932, "It is to be regretted that we have nothing of the Bradwell correspondence except the tradition." In 1953 the most respected Mary Lincoln

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biographer of all, Ruth Painter Randall, dismissed them in a single sentence: "Her letters to the Bradwells have vanished." The compilers of Mary's life and letters, Justin G. and Linda Levitt Turner, wrote in 1972, "None of Mrs. Lincoln's letters to the Bradwells remains, and there is reason to believe Robert had theirs to her destroyed, so damning were they to him."

Prior to the finding of these letters, only 11 Mary Lincoln letters were known to exist for the period from 1874 to 1875. This cache adds 8 more, but it also includes letters from 1872 to 1873 and 1876 to 1878. This is important because, as the Turners wrote, "Letters written by Mary Lincoln in the period between 1871 and 1876 are today the rarest of items," while nearly all extant letters from 1877 until her death in 1882 were solely about financial matters.

the lost letters offer many new insights into Mary's mental and physical condition before, during, and after the 1875 insanity episode; what she did to secure her freedom from the sanitarium; the opinions of her family and friends on her incarceration; the estrangement between Mary and her son Robert as a result of the insanity episode; and her life in Europe afterward, about which very little is known.

In addition to the letters, the steamer trunk contained a 111page unpublished manuscript about the insanity case, "The Dark Days of Abraham Lincoln's Widow, as Revealed by Her Own Letters," written in the late 1920s by a descendant of Myra and James Bradwell. It is because of this manuscript that the lost letters were hidden from history.

In October 1927, a little more than a year after the death of Robert Lincoln, his wife, Mary Harlan Lincoln, received an unexpected visitor to her home in Manchester, Vermont. Myra Pritchard, the granddaughter of James and Myra Bradwell, called as a courtesy to inform Mrs. Lincoln she was about to publish a book on Mary Todd Lincoln. Pritchard's personal papers (which this author found still in her family's possession) show that Myra's mother, Bessie Bradwell Helmer, gave 37 letters by or about Mary Lincoln to her daughter with the stipulation that they be published, but not until both Bessie Helmer and Robert Lincoln had died. "My mother was most anxious that these letters be published," Pritchard wrote, "because she felt that Mrs. Abraham Lincoln had been maligned and that these letters would explain much of the real Mrs. Lincoln to the world and place her in a more favorable light."

Mary Harlan Lincoln not only agreed to have her attorneys meet with Mrs. Pritchard in Washington, D.C., and inspect the manuscript but also suggested that she might be able to add information from her own files. This offer, later events made clear, was intended as a delaying action. Far from helping Myra Pritchard, Mary Harlan Lincoln thwarted her.

After examining the manuscript, and knowing full well that throughout his entire life Robert Lincoln had sought to suppress or discourage publication of his mother's letters, Mary's attorneys, Frederic Towers and Norman Frost, told Pritchard that three letters quoted in the manuscript were "objectionable" to Mrs. Lincoln. Myra Pritchard was unwilling to omit them but found herself threatened with a lawsuit if she did not (similar cases had established that the writer of a letter—and his or her heirs—not the recipient, was the actual owner). Her only recourse, she realized, was to accept an offer made by Towers and Frost: sell the letters and the manuscript to the Lincoln family for \$22,500. The contract stated that all materials and copies in Myra Pritchard's possession be handed over, that no other copies exist, and that she turn over any subsequently obtained letters.

As unhappy as Myra Pritchard was about the sale, she upheld her agreement of silence. But her silence was not a complete acquiescence, for she had secretly kept typewritten copies of all the Mary Lincoln letters along with her book manuscript.

When Myra Pritchard died in February 1947, her sister-in-law, Margreta Pritchard, burned the 1928 manuscript, as Myra had requested. But she didn't destroy the copies of the letters. She approached Oliver R. Barrett, a prominent Chicago attorney and one of the foremost Lincoln collectors in America at the time, to ask his advice on whether or not they should be published. Barrett felt it would not be "exactly morally right" to reveal letters that Robert Lincoln had so aggressively sought to keep private during his life and which his family had taken the time and expense to purchase. He urged her to destroy them, and eventually she did. But she kept all the personal and legal documentation concerning the provenance, sale, and destruction of the letters, which her relatives still possess.

For her part, Mary Harlan Lincoln left the letters and Pritchard materials with her attorney, Frederic Towers. Upon his retirement, he placed them, along with countless other Lincoln-family documents, in a steamer trunk and stored them all in his attic.

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This author found them there, last summer, after a five-month search.

Nervous, emotional, and high-strung, Mary Lincoln suffered a life full of tragedy and disappointment. While there is disagreement over exactly when her mental troubles began in earnest, her only surviving son, Robert, said that her husband's assassination, along with a head injury she received in an 1863 carriage accident, were the two main causes.

The known and accepted facts of the insanity episode are that it started in March 1875, when, during a visit to Jacksonville, Florida, Mary became unshakably convinced that Robert was deathly ill. She traveled to Chicago to find him in fine health. On her arrival, she told her son that someone had tried to poison her on the train and that a "wandering Jew" had taken her pocketbook but would return it later. During her stay in Chicago, Mary spent money lavishly on useless items, and walked around the city with \$56,000 in government bonds sewn into her petticoats.

Dr. Willis Danforth, Mary's physician, had been treating the widow for more than a year for fever and nervous derangement. As Danforth later testified at the insanity trial, the widow claimed then that an Indian spirit was removing bones from her face and pulling wires out of her eyes. She told Danforth that she heard raps on the table revealing the time of her death, and she would sit and ask questions and repeat the table's answers.

Robert, fearing for her safety, hired Pinkerton detectives to follow and watch over her. He consulted with personal and family friends as well as several doctors about her condition. As he later wrote to one of his mother's friends, "Six physicians in council informed me that by longer delay I was making myself morally responsible for some very probable tragedy, which might occur at any moment." On the basis of the doctors' advice, Robert took steps to place her in specialized care. Under Illinois state law, the only way he could do this was to initiate insanity proceedings against her in county court.

On May 19, 1875, after three hours of testimony from physicians, hotel personnel, shopkeepers, and Robert himself, a jury declared her insane. Robert testified that he had "no doubt" about this. "She has been of unsound mind since the death of father; has been irresponsible for the past ten years." She was taken to a private sanitarium called Bellevue Place in Batavia, and Robert was made conservator of her estate.

Although he spoke of the assassination, Robert Lincoln—and others—always believed the root of Mary's mania was money: her indefatigable need to spend it and her paranoid conviction that she had none. "The simple truth, which I cannot tell anyone not personally interested, is that my mother is on one subject not mentally responsible," Robert wrote to his future wife, Mary Harlan, in 1867. "You could hardly believe it possible, but my mother protests to me that she is in actual want and nothing I can do or say will convince her to the contrary." In fact, Abraham Lincoln's estate was more than \$83,000 upon his death, one-third of which was Mary's. Moreover, she received \$22,000 in late 1865 as the remainder of her husband's presidential salary, and Congress voted her a \$3,000 annual pension in 1870. Robert told Mary Harlan in 1867 that there was nothing he could do. "I have taken the advice of one or two of my friends in whom I trust most and they tell me I can do nothing. It is terribly irksome to sit still under all that has happened and say nothing, but it has to be done. The greatest misery of all is the fear of what may happen in the future." Just eight years later he was forced to act.

Bellevue Place was a private asylum for "a select class of lady patients of quiet unexceptionable habits." Dr. Richard J. Patterson, who lived in the main house there with his family, used the most modern "moral" treatment of "rest, diet, baths, fresh air, occupation, diversion, change of scene, no more medicine than ... absolutely necessary, and the least restraint possible." In this place Mary Lincoln lived near the Patterson family in a two-room suite, and as Robert later explained to critics, "There is nothing about his house to indicate an asylum except that outside of the windows there is a white wire netting such as you may see often to keep children from falling out of the window." Even that wire netting was removed at Robert's request. Mary lived apart from the other patients, had a private bath, kept her own room key, and had the freedom to go for a walk or take a carriage ride whenever she chose.

The Bellevue patient logbook shows that for the first two months of her stay, Mary Lincoln was quiet and solitary, a bit erratic with her desires, and at times depressed. Dr. Patterson thought she was improving. Robert Lincoln visited his mother every week, and he found her most cordial. "While she will not in words admit that she is not sane, still her entire acquiescence in absolutely everything ... makes me think that she is aware of the necessity of what has been done," Robert wrote to John Hay, his father's secretary. The situation changed from a lamentable family affair to a painful


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public controversy upon the entrance of Myra and James Bradwell.

James B. Bradwell, a Chicago attorney who had represented Mary Lincoln in the past, was, in 1875, a member of the state legislature. His wife, Myra Colby Bradwell, was an abolitionist, a feminist, and the founder and editor of the *Chicago Legal News*, although she could not practice law herself. She had passed the Illinois bar exam with high honors in 1869 but had been denied a license to practice because she was a married woman. Both the Illinois Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the denial.

The currently known and accepted narrative of events is that after a visit from a Chicago newspaper reporter in early July of 1875, Mary Lincoln began the orchestration of her plot for freedom. While mailing a letter to her sister, done at Robert's suggestion, Mary apparently smuggled letters to many other people, seeking help in her release. On the very next day Gen. John Franklin Farnsworth, a Republican politician, came to visit, as did the Bradwells. They told Dr. Patterson they had been asked to help secure Mrs. Lincoln's freedom, saying she should be let free and kept under the care of "some tender and sympathetic friend," while Robert continued to control her money.

Mary's sister, Elizabeth Edwards, meanwhile responded to Mary's letter with an invitation to come visit her in Springfield. There followed a flurry of letters and meetings between Robert Lincoln, Elizabeth Edwards, and Myra Bradwell. Robert did not want his mother to leave Bellevue; he believed that left to her own, she would endanger herself and her property, for which he was responsible. Elizabeth Edwards had proposed only a short stay, assuming Mary would be in the care and company of a professional nurse and would return to Bellevue for continued treatment. When she realized that Mary, urged by Myra Bradwell, intended the "visit" to be permanent, in place of Bellevue, she withdrew her invitation, citing ill-health.

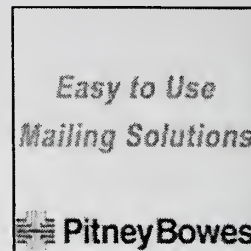
For her part, Myra Bradwell wrote and visited both Elizabeth Edwards and Robert Lincoln, urging Mary's freedom. She persuaded Mrs. Edwards to change her mind and care for Mary. Myra and her husband also undertook a vigorous public relations campaign. They fed stories about Mary's unjust treatment to the papers, they gave interviews, and they even brought a reporter from the *Chicago Times* to Bellevue. The paper's August 24 story was headlined: "Mrs. Lincoln. Her Physicians Pronounce Her Entirely Sane."

Robert Lincoln considered the Bradwells meddlers in affairs that were none of their business. "What trouble Mrs. Bradwell may give me with her interference I cannot foretell," he wrote his aunt in early August 1875. He also said that Dr. Patterson had "expressed a fear that Mrs. Bradwell's visits and manner of late would tend to undo the good that has been accomplished." Finally, he asked Myra not to visit his mother so often. An editorial in the *Chicago Tribune*, a pro-Republican (which is to say, pro-Robert) newspaper, insisted the scandal over Mary's incarceration had been "set afloat by over-officious and intermeddling mischief-makers, who interfered in a matter which did not concern them, for purposes of sensation." Whether for sensation or out of friendship, the Bradwells succeeded in pressuring Robert to agree to Mary's release. She moved into the Edwards home in September 1875.

The "lost" insanity letters collection contains 11 letters from Mary's time at Bellevue. Most were written by her, but some are from Myra and James Bradwell, Elizabeth Edwards, and Dr. Patterson. They show Mary questioning her religious faith, illuminate her continuing mania about money and clothing, and, perhaps most interesting, reveal the Bradwells to have been more instrumental than previously known both in securing her release and in causing her resentment of Robert.

When the *Chicago Evening Post and Mail* correspondent visited Mary Lincoln at Bellevue in July 1875, as mentioned above, Mary Lincoln asked the reporter about her friends in Chicago and "alluded to her attachment to Judge Bradwell's family." What has gone unrecorded in the insanity story is that after reading the *Post and Mail* story, Myra Bradwell journeyed to Bellevue to visit her friend "to satisfy myself in regard to Mrs. Lincoln's insanity." Dr. Patterson refused to let her either visit Mary Lincoln or leave her a note, she reported to the Bloomington (Indiana) *Courier*. Patterson's treatment of Myra led her to exclaim about her friend, "Then she is a prisoner, is she not?"

It was after the press interview that Mrs. Lincoln is supposed to have secretly mailed letters to several people seeking help in her release. One of the newly discovered letters shows that in fact she sent only one, to her attorney, James Bradwell. "May I request you to come out here just so soon as you receive this note. Please bring out your dear wife, Mr. Wm. Sturgess and any other friend," she wrote. "Also bring Mr. W. F. Storey with you. I am sure you will not disappoint me. Drive up to the house. Also



telegraph to Genl. Farnsworth to meet you here."

Mary's request for w. f. storey is another interesting revelation from this letter. The editor of the *Chicago Times*, Storey had been an antiwar Copperhead during the Civil War and afterward was an outspoken reporter and critic of Chicago society. His motto was: "To print the news and raise hell." Storey did not visit Bellevue but sent a reporter, Franc B. Wilkie, who wrote the August 24 *Times* story about Mary's sanity that caused such a public controversy. This letter shows the story was Mary's idea, not the Bradwells', as has long been supposed.

After their visit, and at Mary's behest, the Bradwells wrote to both Mary's sister Elizabeth and her cousin John Todd Stuart, seeking their aid in her release. James Bradwell told Stuart that Mary "feels lonesome and that the restraint of the place is unendurable." Myra Bradwell told Elizabeth Edwards that Mary "feels her incarceration most terribly and desires to get out from behind the grates and bars." This last is a charge Myra Bradwell would later make to newspapers as well. Both Bradwells suggested Mary visit the Edwards home in Springfield. "I cannot feel that it is necessary to keep her thus restrained," Myra Bradwell wrote in her July 30 letter. "Perhaps I do not look at the matter rightly, but let this be my excuse—I love her most tenderly and feel sorry to see one heart ache added to her already overburdened soul."

Mrs. Edwards's reply to Myra Bradwell, found amid the "lost" letters, shows something never before seen: her honest opinion regarding her sister's incarceration. Her 200-word letter agreed with Myra Bradwell's assessment that Mary never should have been put in Bellevue but instead have had a "protector" and "companionship." Elizabeth Edwards wrote, "Had I been consulted, I would have remonstrated earnestly against the step taken." She later apologized to Robert for the contents of this letter, because it stoked Myra Bradwell's resolve.

there are five "lost" letters from mary lincoln to the Bradwells during August 1875. In them, she repeatedly requests they communicate with more of her old friends and seek their help. She also gives vent to her sorrows and frustrations with such statements as "It does not appear that God is good, to have placed me here" and "I am sleeping very finely and as I am perfectly sane, I do not desire to become insane." In her importunings for help she wrote, "God will not fail to reward you if you do not fail to visit the widow of Abraham Lincoln in her solitude."

One of Mary's original symptoms was her obsession with clothing and personal goods, a mania that is evident in some of these August letters. In one, Mary asks Mrs. Bradwell to bring her samples of black alpaca and heavier black woolen goods. In her next letter, she urges Mrs. Bradwell to "say nothing" to anyone about her request for materials. In two subsequent letters Mary asks her friend to bring two trunks full of clothing and a forgotten key to a third trunk. While such requests sound innocuous, to Robert and Dr. Patterson they were evidence of Mary's continuing troubles.

But Robert's chagrin at his mother's clothing mania was not the cause of their ultimate estrangement, which lasted five years. In fact the new letters suggest that it was not the incarceration that caused the family split but rather the influence of the Bradwells. Both the Bellevue patient logs and Robert's own letters attest that at first Mary Lincoln was very cordial to him during his weekly visits, but the Bradwells seemed to have planted seeds of resentment. Myra's letters and newspaper interviews make no secret that she considered Mary a prisoner. It is no great leap to suggest that Myra berated Robert and his motives in his mother's presence and, whether implicitly or directly, encouraged Mary to do the same.

Mary's changing attitude is shown when she wrote the Bradwells in early August: "... if I have used excited words in reference to my son, may God forgive me, and may you both forget it." Yet a week later a coolness was evident: "I rather think he would prefer my remaining here in his heart," almost as if echoing some similar sentiment of Myra Bradwell's. The mother-son relationship soured from there, with Mary constantly flinging accusations that Robert was hoarding her possessions.

On June 15, 1876, the verdict of a second trial in county court declared Mary Lincoln "restored to reason" and capable of governing her property. Four days later she wrote to Robert what has become one of the most famous insanity letters, denouncing his "wicked conduct" against her and demanding the return of all her property in his possession. "Send me all that I have written for, you have tried your game of robbery long enough," she said. This statement certainly attests to Mary's belief that her son put her in Bellevue in order to steal her money, a charge later repeated by historians. In fact, Robert's stewardship of his mother's holdings resulted in more than \$4,000 in interest, and he accepted no compensation for his conservatorship, although he could have.

This letter has long fueled speculation that Mary's lost insanity letters may be replete with denunciations of Robert, vindictive revelations of his secrets, and perhaps even evidence that the entire trial and insanity episode was, as one book claimed, a "kangaroo court" full of "brazen injustice," and a "high-handed denial of her civil rights."

The letters do contain many venomous statements about Robert. The most interesting, and most powerful, was written to Myra Bradwell on June 18, 1876, the day before Mary's final letter to Robert. Its 700 words are vicious and splenetic. She decries Robert as a thief who, desiring her money, "brought false charges against me." She states that because of his conduct, he will not be allowed to approach his father in heaven and that "this one as my beloved husband always said was so different from the rest of us." She then tells Myra Bradwell that Robert committed great "imprecations against you all" and encourages the Bradwells and Franc Wilkie of the *Chicago Times* to write articles denouncing his actions: "have justice rendered me ... I have been a deeply wronged woman, by one, for whom I would have poured out my life's blood." The letter also contains the surprising revelation that Mary's hair had turned white during the course of the insanity episode, a bleaching that she blamed on Robert.

A few months after regaining her property, and having severed all contact with Robert, Mary went into self-exile in Europe. She claimed she could not bear the soothing manner of people who would never stop thinking her a lunatic. She spent the next four years traveling the Continent while based in Pau, France. There are approximately 100 known letters from this period of her life, the majority being to her banker and containing only financial matters. Very little is known about her time abroad. Ten of the "lost" letters, however, date from 1876 to 1878 and offer significant insight into Mary's European years.

The most striking aspect of all 10 letters is that they are calm, rational, and cogent, full of descriptions of her travels and inquiries about friends and events at home. She offered an explanation for her peace in a December 1876 letter: "I am allowed tranquility here and am not harassed by a demon." The demon, of course, was Robert; the harassment would be his criticism of her spending habits.

In these later letters she is no longer questioning the justice of God; now she is trusting in Him for healing and peace, as well as for vengeance against her enemies. She occasionally rails against her son and mentions her husband, often in terms of apotheosis, "my darling husband, who worshipped me so greatly, that often he said, that I was his weakness." She mentions her physical health: boils under her left arm and pain over her entire body. The spa waters of Vichy "did me no good."

Perhaps the most intriguing letter of all is from Sorrento, Italy, in April 1878. In it, she calls April her "season of sadness" and feels the sadness more keenly because she is returning to spots she first saw in the 1860s, in the midst of her bereavement. "It is only by a strong effort of will that I revisit these places," she wrote. "My beloved husband and myself for hours would sit down and anticipate the pleasant time, we would have in quietly visiting places and halting in such spots as this, when his official labors were ended. God works in such a mysterious way and we are left to bow to His will. But to some of us, resignation will never come. But perhaps for the tears shed here, compensation will succeed the grief of the present time."

The post-Bellevue letters also clearly show Mary's close friendship with Myra Bradwell. They contain statements attesting to her love for Myra and constant desire to see her and hear from her. Mary was forever grateful for the friendship of the Bradwells. In later years she wrote, "When all others, among them my husband's supposed friends, failed me in the most bitter hours of my life, these loyal hearts, Myra and James Bradwell, came to my assistance and rescued me under great difficulty from confinement in an insane asylum."

Mary Lincoln returned from Europe in October 1880. Her physical health was deteriorating. In September she had fallen off a chair while hanging a painting and seriously injured her back, which made it difficult for her to walk. She returned to Springfield to live with her sister and spent most of her time in her room, sitting in the dark with a single candle, packing and unpacking her 64 trunks of clothing, and sleeping only on one side of her bed to leave "the President's place" on the other side undisturbed. She and Robert reconciled in 1881, not long after President Garfield appointed him Secretary of War. Mary Lincoln died in her sister's home on July 16, 1882, at the age of 64, most likely of complications from diabetes.

David Davis, Abraham Lincoln's campaign manager, estate executor, and friend, wrote upon hearing of Mary Lincoln's death: "Poor Mrs. Lincoln! She is at last at rest. She has been a deranged woman, ever since her husband's death. In fact she was so, during his life."

There have been many books and articles written about Mary Lincoln's insanity case in the 131 years since it occurred. These works have examined everything from the extent of her insanity to Robert's motivations to the unfair treatment of women by nineteenth-century American medical and legal professionals. Varying interpretations continue.

What can be agreed upon, however, is that the newly discovered "lost" letters will write a new chapter on the insanity episode. Their discovery continues to prove that even 141 years after Abraham Lincoln's assassination, there are still unknown jewels waiting to tell us yet more about the family of the most closely studied American in history.

Jason Emerson is currently working on a book about the Mary Lincoln insanity letters, to be published by Southern Illinois University Press in 2007, and a biography of Robert Lincoln to be titled Giant in the Shadows.

The Lincoln Marriage

By Jason Emerson

The marriage of Abraham and Mary Lincoln was at times trying and turbulent but by most accounts was based on love. Unfortunately, not many letters between the two still exist to offer testimony to that fact.

Of course the Lincoln marriage started rather incongruously, and some thought it too odd to last. Abraham Lincoln was an attorney and a member of the state legislature, but he grew up an impoverished, backwoods farmer. Mary Todd came from a rich, aristocratic Lexington family. She had 13 years of schooling and lived in a house with slaves. While Mary was beautiful, young, and vivacious when Lincoln met her, she was also outspoken, spoiled, petulant, and selfish.

Yet letters from Lincoln's single term in Congress attest to their love. He wrote in 1848: "In this troublesome world, we are never quite satisfied. When you were here, I thought you hindered me some in attending to business but now, having nothing but business—no vanity—it has grown exceedingly tasteless to me. I hate to sit down and direct documents, and I hate to stay in this old room by myself." Part of Mary's response stated, "How much, I wish instead of writing, we were together this evening, I feel very sad away from you."

Mary Lincoln, however, "was gifted with an unusually high temper and that invariably got the better of her," according to one Springfield neighbor. James Gourley said the Lincolns had their ups and downs, like all families, but got along as well as anyone. "Lincoln yielded to his wife—in fact, almost any other man, had he known the woman as I did, would have done the same thing." Lincoln sometimes would ignore his wife's hysterics, Gourley stated, and frequently he would laugh at her. If Mary did not calm down, he would simply pick up one of the children and leave the house.

Gourley's reminiscences are in accord with others from the White House years. Mary's seamstress, Elizabeth Keckley, wrote in 1868 that Lincoln "was a kind and indulgent husband, and when he saw faults in his wife he excused them as he would excuse the impulsive acts of a child."

There is no doubt that Mary Lincoln had a high temper (Lincoln's White House secretaries referred to her as the Hell Cat), but perhaps it is better to characterize her as overly emotional, not only in anger but also in sorrow. Two specific episodes of overwhelming loss that occurred during Lincoln's life offer a prelude to the 1875 insanity case.

When the Lincolns' second son, Eddie, died in 1850, Mary refused to eat or sleep, forcing Lincoln to plead, "Eat, Mary, for we must live." When their third son, Willie, died in the White House in 1862, Mary submitted to her anguish so thoroughly Lincoln feared for her sanity. "Mrs. Lincoln's grief was inconsolable," Elizabeth Keckley wrote. "In one of her paroxysms of grief the president kindly bent over his wife, took her by the arm, and gently led her to a window. With a stately, solemn gesture, he pointed to the lunatic asylum.

"Mother, do you see that large white building on the hill yonder? Try and control

your grief, or it will drive you mad, and we may have to send you there.”

After the assassination, she again became completely consumed and even incapacitated by her feelings and did not vacate the White House for more than a month. Her friend Dr. Anson G. Henry wrote to his wife in April 1865 that Mary’s misery was so overwhelming because she loved Lincoln with an intensity possible only for such an emotional, high-tempered person.

Mary’s most notorious episode was the old-clothes scandal of 1867, in which she tried to sell some of her White House gowns and jewelry in New York City under a pseudonym. She did this believing herself to be practically destitute, but in reality she was worth more than \$50,000. This fact, along with Mary’s generally poor popular reputation resulting from her temper and her eccentricities, led to her actions being derided in the press as socially improper and embarrassing to the memory of her husband. For many people, including Mary’s son Robert, the scandal was practically verification of the former First Lady’s mental imbalance.

Had Abraham Lincoln survived his Presidency, who can say whether Mary Lincoln would ever have been committed to a sanitarium? The early signs of the reasons for her committal were evident, however, long before 1875.—J.E.

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Belleville.com

Posted on Mon, Jun. 05, 2006

Historian finds copies of letters written by Lincoln's wife at sanitarium

Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD - Copies of long-lost letters written by Abraham Lincoln's wife during her stay at a sanitarium have been discovered in a steamer trunk in a Maryland attic, according to a published report.

The Lincolns' son Robert is thought to have burned the letters to hide details about the mental health of his mother, Mary Todd Lincoln. Robert Lincoln was instrumental in arranging his mother's 1875 insanity trial and commitment to a private sanitarium in Batavia.

Last summer, historian Jason Emerson, of Fredericksburg, Va., came across photographed and handwritten copies of the letters at the home of the descendants of one of Robert's family lawyers.

Emerson also uncovered a 111-page manuscript about Mary Todd Lincoln's insanity case, written by the granddaughter of Mary's legal advisers, Myra and James Bradwell. The find won't cause a major rewrite of history, but will add detail to what's known, one Lincoln expert said.

"Clearly, everyone is going to look at this," Lincoln expert Tom Schwartz, interim director of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, told the (Springfield) State Journal-Register.

"I don't see any major revelations, but again, I'm not working on an extensive biography of any of the leading players, either," Schwartz said. "So much of the story has been pieced together by existing information."

Emerson is writing a book for Southern Illinois University Press about the letters.

"(The letters) show Mary questioning her religious faith, illuminate her continuing mania about money and clothing, and perhaps most interesting, reveal the Bradwells to have been more instrumental than previously known both in securing her release and in causing her resentment of Robert," Emerson writes in the June-July issue of American Heritage magazine.

Some of the 25 Mary Todd Lincoln letters Emerson discovered were written during her visit to Europe after her release from Bellevue Place, the sanitarium in Batavia. Her mental state had improved by then, the letters reveal.

"They are calm, rational and cogent, full of descriptions of her travels and inquiries about friends and events at home," Emerson writes in the magazine.

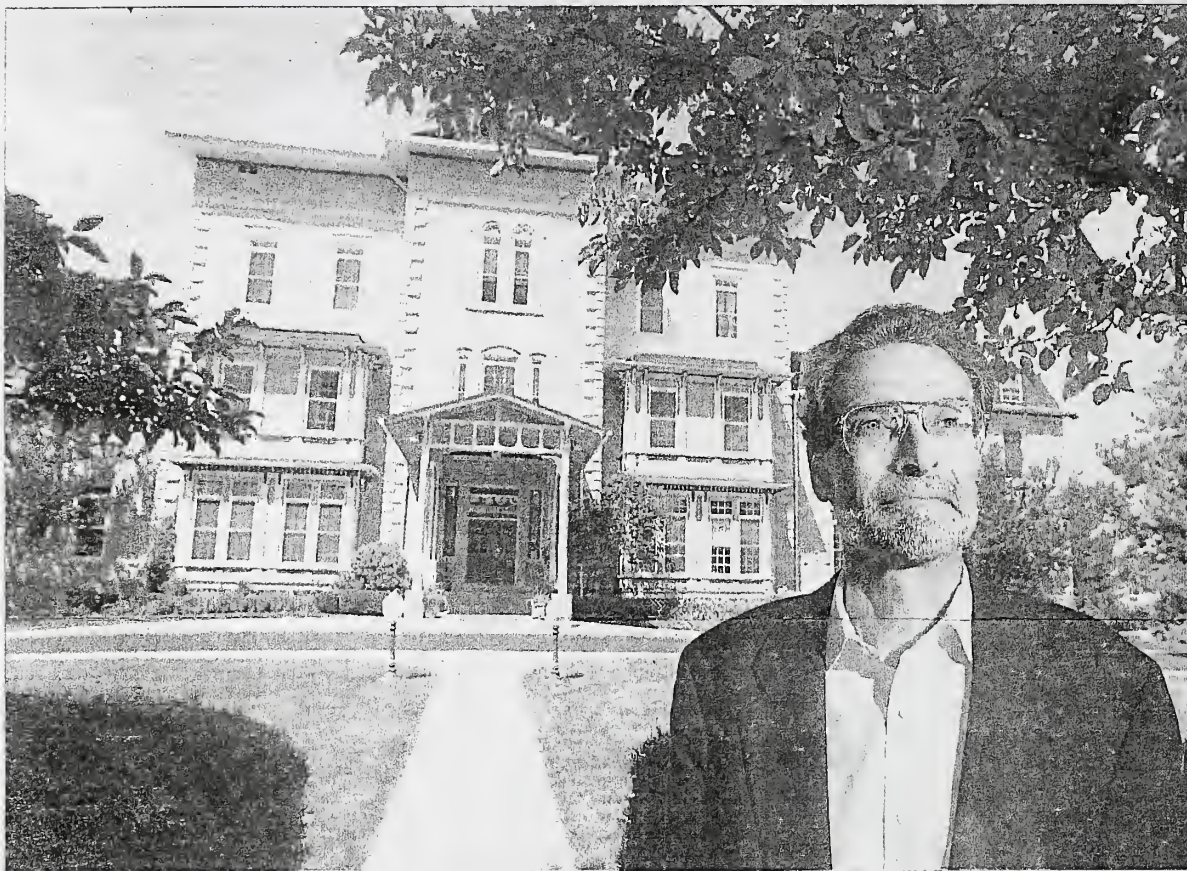
The historian believes the lawyers of Robert Lincoln and wife, Mary Harlan Lincoln, kept copies of the letters and stored them in the steamer trunk, which was left to their children.

On the Net: American Heritage: <http://www.americanheritage.com>

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'To think she walked up these stairs. I just wonder what she was feeling and thinking.'

— Candace Broecker, former owner of Bellevue Place in Batavia, the former asylum where Mary Todd Lincoln was sent against her will



Tribune photo by John Dziekan

Chris Johnson outside the Bellevue Place apartments in Batavia. The building was once a private asylum for mentally disturbed female patients, and First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln was involuntarily committed there in 1875. Johnson lives in 2A, the rooms where Lincoln is believed to have stayed.

Mrs. Lincoln's 'prison'

Long-lost letters tell of Mary Todd Lincoln's fight for release from asylum

By Colleen Mastony | Tribune staff reporter

Batavia, Ill.



— The portrait of Abraham Lincoln hanging in the entranceway is one of the only hints of the building's lost history.

Bellevue Place, a grand structure with a limestone façade and towering windows, was once a sanitarium for women — and in the summer of 1875 a Cook County jury declared Mary Todd Lincoln insane and sent her here against her will.

The building is now an apartment complex, and the details of Lincoln's stay have been lost in the passage of time. But current residents say they often wonder about the former first lady.

"To think she walked up these stairs," said Candace Broecker, 62, who once owned the building. "I just wonder what she was feeling and thinking."

Such questions might soon find answers. Recently discovered letters written by Lincoln while she was in Batavia could lend new insight into the little-known history.

Descendants of a Lincoln family lawyer found a dusty trunk while cleaning out their attic last summer in Chevy Chase, Md. Inside, they found copies of 25 letters — including 20 written by Lincoln, 11 of which were written from Batavia. The full text of the letters will be released next year in a book by history writer Jason Emerson.

"This is a significant cache," said Jean H. Baker,

author of the book "Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography"

News of the discovery has stirred excitement among Batavia residents, who have for decades searched for information about Lincoln's stay in town.

"The legend has grown with the passage of time," said Jeffery Schielke, 57, mayor of Batavia. "Still, there's not a lot of stories about her stay here. I'll be anxious to peruse these letters."

Few today realize that, after Abraham Lincoln's assassination, Mary Todd Lincoln moved to Chicago.

She first lived at the Tremont House, a posh down-

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LINCOLN: She acted increasingly disturbed

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

town hotel, then moved to Hyde Park and eventually bought a house at 1304 W. Washington St., still there today.

The insanity allegations surfaced in the spring of 1875, when Lincoln's behavior had grown increasingly erratic. She walked the streets with \$56,000 sewn into her petticoat, visited clairvoyants in attempts to communicate with the dead, and at one point became convinced that someone on a train had slipped poison into her coffee.

By May, Lincoln's son, Robert — then a prominent Chicago attorney — initiated court proceedings to have her involuntarily committed. After a three-hour trial, a Cook County jury found the former first lady to be insane. The next day Mary Todd Lincoln was taken to Bellevue Place in Batavia.

At the time, Bellevue was an asylum that catered exclusively to wealthy women. The hospital took a modern approach, advis-



Tribune photo by: John Dziekan
Mary Todd Lincoln, the wife of Abraham Lincoln, is shown at left in her inaugural ball gown. A plaque (above) in the garden at Bellevue Place in Batavia, Ill., explains the Lincoln connection. Bellevue was a mental hospital that catered exclusively to wealthy women during the time Lincoln was there. At right is a letter Lincoln wrote during her stay at the sanitarium. The letter was provided by history writer Jason Emerson via the State Journal-Register of Springfield.

ing bed rest and fresh air, and offering activities such as piano and croquet. An advertisement for the hospital called it: "For the Insane of the Private Class."

Living in a prison

The newly discovered letters show that Lincoln considered it a prison.

In August 1875, according to

one of the recently found letters, she wrote: "It does not appear that God is good, to have placed me here. I endeavor to read my Bible and offer up my petitions three times a day. But my afflicted heart fails me and my voice often falters in prayer. I have worshiped my son and no unpleasant word ever passed between us, yet I can not under-

stand why I should have been brought out here."

Historians have long known that Mary Todd Lincoln lobbied for release and grew increasingly incensed at Robert for having her sent to Batavia. But the letters add new detail.

They show her questioning her religion, pleading for assistance from friends and furiously denouncing Robert, according to Emerson, who is writing the book.

In the end, Lincoln's efforts succeeded. She marshaled the support of powerful friends, who helped her gain release Sept. 10, 1875. After leaving Bellevue, Lincoln moved to Springfield to live with her sister. She traveled for a time in Europe, and eventually returned again to Springfield, where she died July 16, 1882. She was 62.

Today visitors to Batavia's Depot Museum can see the bed and dresser Lincoln reportedly used at Bellevue, or flip through a transcript of the hospital ledger that includes notes on Lincoln's moods and activities.

(A notation from May 20, 1875: "Case is one of mental impairment which probably dates back to the murder of President Lincoln — More pronounced

since the death of her son, but especially aggravated during the last 2 months.")

Residents at Bellevue Place point to two second-story windows that mark the rooms where Lincoln is believed to have stayed.

The space is now apartment 2A. The current resident is Chris Johnson, a 56-year-old real estate agent. Johnson sometimes looks out his window and thinks of the former first lady. "I wonder, 'Maybe she enjoyed the sparrows,'" Johnson said.

A plaque marks the spot

The building is set back from the main road and marked with a plaque in the front garden and a small brown sign on U.S. Highway 31. Though the sprawling grounds have been sold for condominiums and housing, there is still a garden out front, carefully clipped hedges lining the front walk and lilies blooming by the front door. On a recent day, a white butterfly flitted along the hedge and a black cat ambled across the yard.

Residents hope that Lincoln found comfort at Bellevue.

"I've always had a warm sense that the women who were

there were sitting out under trees and being tended to and drinking tea," said Broecker, the former owner. "I would think back and wonder, 'When she left, did she feel better?'"

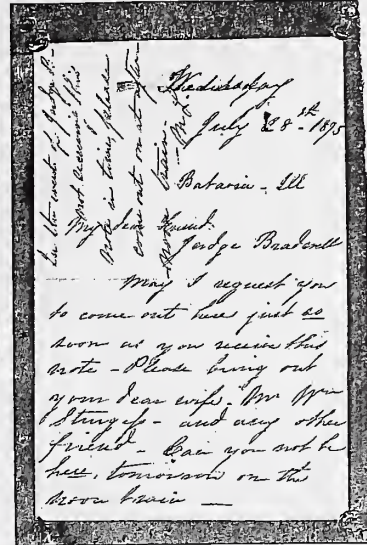
Mary Todd Lincoln has long been a complex and controversial figure. She was hot-tempered and high-strung, an unpopular first lady who was criticized for excessive spending sprees and the lavish parties she threw during the Civil War.

But time has lent perspective. Lincoln had lived through multiple tragedies; three of her four sons died before reaching full adulthood, and she was at her husband's side when he was assassinated April 14, 1865.

Historians have long argued about Lincoln's sanity. Some believe she suffered from serious mental illness. Others argue that she was the victim of an unloving son, who sent her to an asylum to gain control of her money.

"Was she really crazy? I don't think so," Dottie Fletcher, 51, of apartment 1B. "Did she have a nervous breakdown? Probably." As for the letters, Fletcher said: "I can't wait to see them."

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From the White House to an asylum

Letters from Lincoln's widow offer window into time at sanitarium

By COLLEEN MASTONY
Chicago Tribune

BATAVIA, Ill. — The portrait of Abraham Lincoln hanging in the entryway is one of the only hints of the building's lost history.

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Mary Todd Lincoln's relatives started to question her sanity after she walked the streets with \$56,000 in her petticoat and visited clairvoyants to communicate with the dead.

of her stay have been lost. But residents say they often wonder about the former first lady.

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Few today realize that after her husband's assassination, Mrs. Lincoln moved to Chicago. She first lived at the Tremont House, a posh downtown hotel, then moved to Hyde Park and eventually bought a house at 1304 W. Washington St. that still stands today.

Erratic behavior

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piano and croquet. An advertisement for the hospital called it: "For the Insane of the Private Class."

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'I cannot understand'

In August 1875, according to one of the recently found letters, she wrote: "It does not appear that God is good, to have placed me here. I endeavor to read my Bible and offer up my petitions three times a day. But my afflicted heart fails me, and my voice often falters in prayer. I have worshiped my son and no unpleasant word ever passed between us, yet I cannot understand why I should have been brought out here."

Historians have long known that Mrs. Lincoln lobbied for release and grew increasingly incensed at Robert for having her sent to Batavia. But the letters add new detail.

In the end, she marshaled the support of powerful friends, who helped her gain release Sept. 10, 1875. After leaving Bellevue, she moved to Springfield, Ill., to live with her sister. She traveled for a time in Europe and eventually returned again to Springfield, where she died July 16, 1882. She was 62.

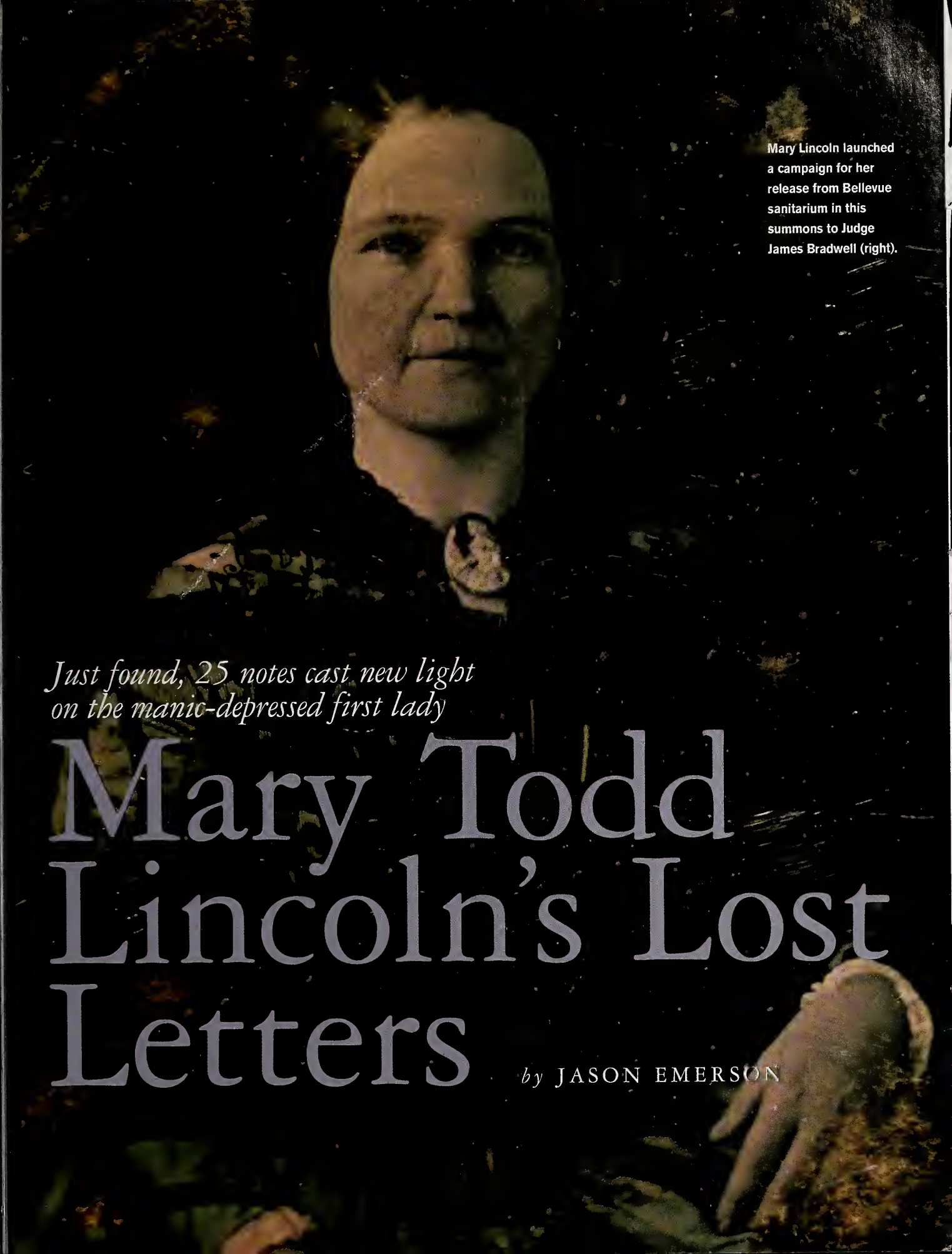
Today, visitors to Batavia's Depot Museum can see the bed and dresser she reportedly used at Bellevue, or flip through a transcript of the hospital ledger that includes notes on her moods and activities.

Residents at Bellevue Place point to two second-story windows that mark the rooms where Mrs. Lincoln is believed to have stayed.

The space is now Apartment 2A. The current resident is Chris Johnson, a 56-year-old real estate agent. He sometimes looks out his window and thinks of the former first lady.

"I wonder, 'Maybe she enjoyed the sparrows,'" Mr. Johnson said.

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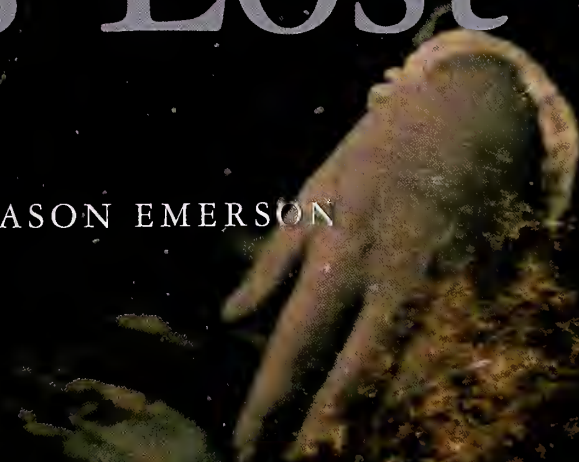


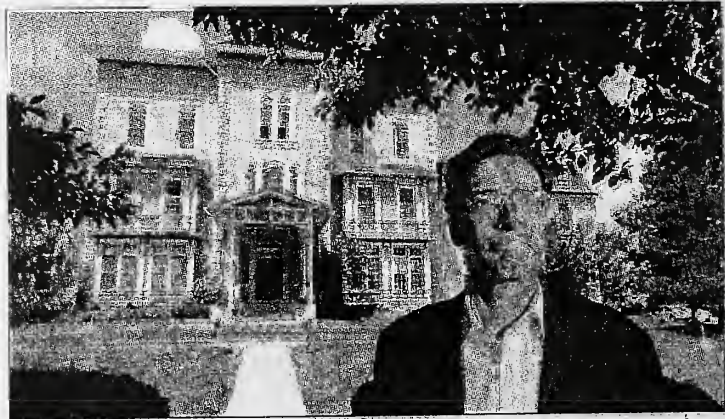
Mary Lincoln launched
a campaign for her
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summons to Judge
James Bradwell (right).

*Just found, 25 notes cast new light
on the manic-depressed first lady*

Mary Todd Lincoln's Lost Letters

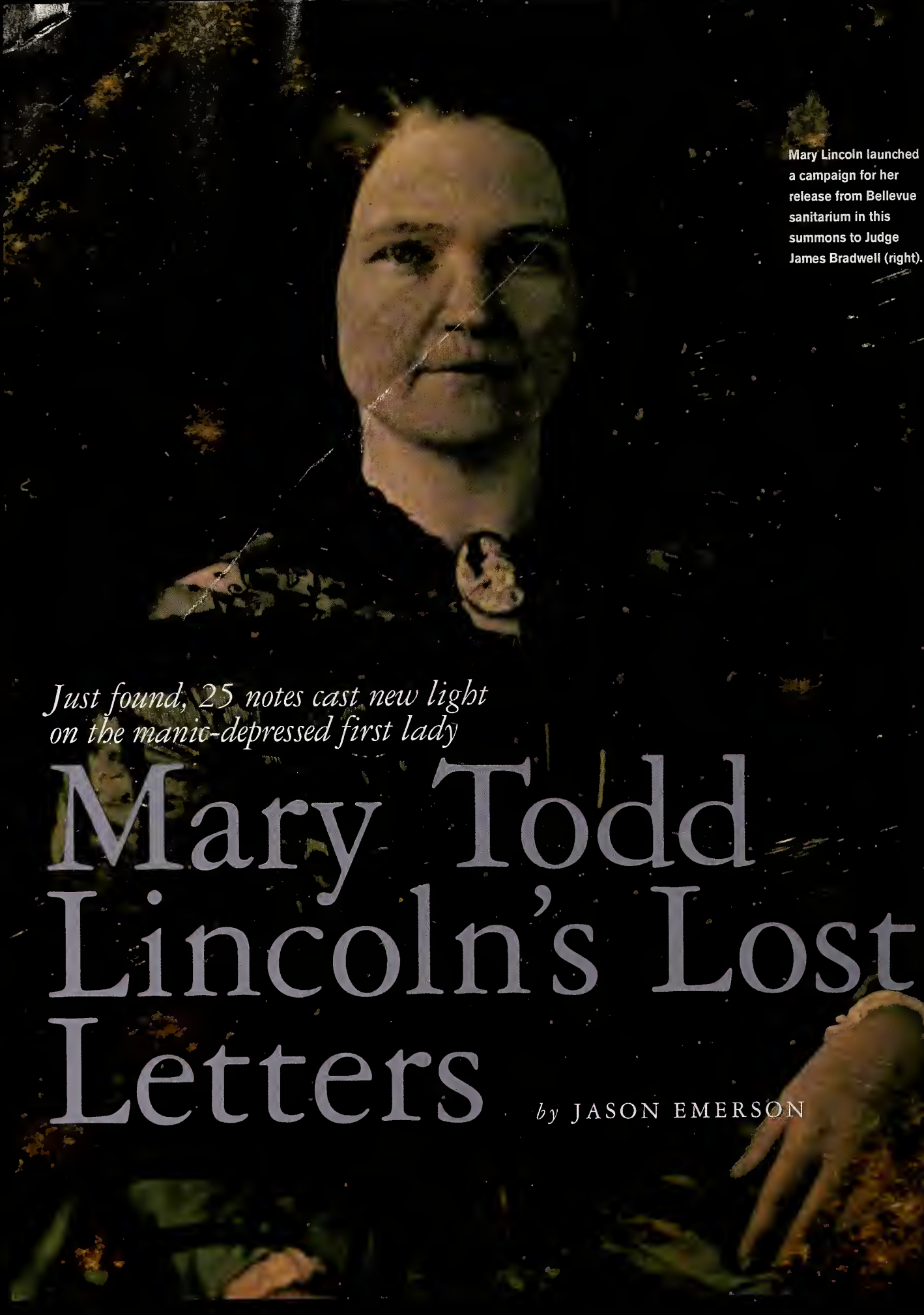
by JASON EMERSON





JOHN DZIEKAN/Chicago Tribune

Chris Johnson lives in a space believed to be where Mrs. Lincoln stayed when the building was a sanitarium.




Mary Lincoln launched
a campaign for her
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*Just found, 25 notes cast new light
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Mary Todd Lincoln's Lost Letters

by JASON EMERSON



In the event of Judge B.
My not receiving this
note in time, please
come out on at after
train -
July 28th - 189
Batavia - Ill
My dear friend:
Judge Bradwell

May I request you
to come out here just so
soon as you receive this
note - Please bring out
your dear wife. Mr Wm
Stungess - and any other
friend - Can you not be



On July 2, 1863, while a ferocious battle raged between Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and George Meade's Army of the Potomac at Gettysburg, Mary Lincoln, the president's wife, was in a carriage accident. It was a minor event, given only one-paragraph briefs in the Washington newspapers, but it seemed to have a major impact on the deteriorating mental health of the maligned first lady that would land her, by the hand of her son, in an insane asylum in 1875.

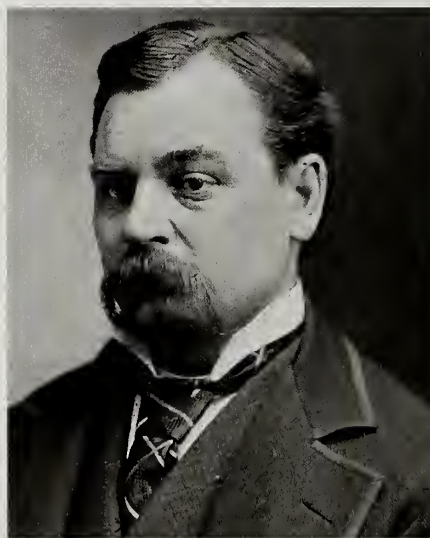
President Lincoln arrived at the War Department telegraph office early that morning to monitor the battle in Pennsylvania. Mary rode alone the three miles from the presidential summer retreat on the outskirts of Washington to the White House. During the drive down Rock Creek Road, near Mount Pleasant Hospital, the driver's seat of the presidential carriage became detached, throwing the driver to the ground. The frightened horses began to run, and Mary leaped from the carriage to save herself. The papers reported that she was stunned, bruised and battered, but her injuries, which were immediately administered to by surgeons at the nearby hospital, did not appear serious. She did suffer a bleeding wound on the back of her head, apparently caused by a sharp stone, which doctors stitched up.

As was common then, Mary's wound became infected, and it was three weeks before she was up and about. Afterward the first lady, a victim of severe migraine headaches her entire adult life, had them with greater frequency. Robert Lincoln later told his aunt that his mother never fully recovered from her head injury.

Mary Todd Lincoln's mental health had been fodder for conjecture, bias, innuendo and ridicule even before she stepped on the national stage with the election of her husband as president in 1860. But it was her White House years, marked by extravagant parties, costly redecorating and relentless spending sprees—all amid a national crisis—that shaped a negative image of her. Her later "insanity trial" sealed her place in history.

But exactly how insane was Mary Todd Lincoln?

We could ask a psychiatrist for a diagnosis, albeit from the distance of 130 years. Using the American Psychiatric Association's multiaxial diagnostic system, a therapist most likely could study her personality factors, her medical symptoms and her psychosocial and environmental stressors, then make an assessment of her overall level of functioning. "Were she alive today, Mary Lincoln would still require psychiatric hospitalization in the face of the symptoms she suffered in 1875, and her family would confront the same dilemma if she declined it," says Dr. James S. Brust, a psychiatrist who has studied the case.



"A good hater," as one historian characterized her, Mary Lincoln focused her animosity on her son Robert for having her declared insane.

Or we might ask Mary herself, through newly discovered correspondence with her friend Myra Bradwell—letters that historians have been seeking for 80 years. Traced

by this author to a trunk in the attic of Robert Lincoln's attorney, the letters provide insights into Mary's condition before, during and after her commitment to the insane asylum. They shed light on the actions she took to secure her freedom from the sanitarium, on the opinions of her family and friends about her hospitalization, on her friendship with and dependence on Myra Bradwell, on the estrangement between Mary and her son Robert and on her life in Europe after institutionalization. From the multiplicity of psychotic episodes, it becomes clear that her commitment did not result simply from one incident but rather from the numerous episodes she suffered throughout her life. The letters demonstrate that Mary Lincoln fostered her own early release from the insane asylum, and that her time there actually helped alleviate some of her symptoms.

Throughout her life, Mary Todd Lincoln showed signs of what later would be termed manic-depressive illness and now is known as bipolar disorder—symptoms of depression, delusions of persecution, poverty and various somatic ailments, hallucinations, inflated self-esteem, decreased or interrupted sleep, mood swings, monomania (extravagant spending), threats of physical violence against others and attempts at suicide. Even as a child, a cousin of Mary's observed that she was "very highly strung...having an emotional temperament much like an April day, sunning all over with laughter one moment, the next crying as though her heart would break." As a young woman in Springfield, it was known that Mary was "either in the garret or the cellar." When she was living in the White House, presidential secretary William O. Stoddard wrote, "It was not easy, at first, to understand why a lady who could be one day so kindly, so considerate, so generous, so thoughtful and so hopeful, could, upon another day, appear so unreasonable, so irritable, so despondent, so even niggardly, and so prone to see the dark, the wrong side of men and women and events."

Emotions shaped Mary's personality and formed the background for her later self-indulgence following the deaths of her

husband and two children, says psychologist and biographer W.A. Evans. "No other [trait] was more potent in changing [her personality] from the grade termed 'abnormal' to that termed 'pathologic,' and in changing her mentality from balanced to unbalanced."

Mary was much criticized for her abnormal behavior in Washington. Besides her lavish spending habits, she was disparaged for her "inordinate greed, coupled with an utter lack of sense of propriety," which manifested itself in an easy willingness to accept gifts for her influence with the president and through her susceptibility to flattery. Psychiatrist James A. Brussel called this Mary's narcissistic lavishness, noting, "She thrived on adulation, required attention, reveled in adornment, and was sensitive to snubs." She was from Kentucky, so Northerners considered her a Rebel; Southerners considered her a traitor; and she was therefore derided by the presses of both sections of the country.

No public condemnation, however, ever undid Mary emotionally as much as the death of her 11-year-old son Willie in 1862. Both parents felt the loss deeply, but as Elizabeth Keckly, Mary's seamstress and dear friend, wrote: "Mrs. Lincoln's grief was inconsolable. In one of her paroxysms of grief the President kindly bent over his wife, took her by the arm, and gently led her to a window. With a stately, solemn gesture, he pointed to the lunatic asylum. 'Mother, do you see that large white building on the hill yonder? Try and control your grief, or it will drive you mad, and we may have to send you there.'"

Keckly's reminiscence is not the only reported instance of Abraham Lincoln commenting on his wife's mental state. William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, wrote in 1882 that "Mr. Lincoln held his wife partly insane for years, and this shows his toleration of her nature—his great forbearance of her outlandish acts, otherwise not understood by the great world." William P. Wood, superintendent of the Old Capitol Prison, said in 1887 that Lincoln confided in him during the war that his wife's caprices "are the result of partial insanity." Emily Todd Helm, Mary's half-sister, recorded in her diary a now-famous episode in which Mary came

into her room at night, smiling and with eyes full of tears, to tell her that Willie visited her at night to comfort her in her sorrow: "'He lives Emily!' she said with a thrill in her voice I can never forget. 'He comes to me every night, and stands at the foot of my bed with the same sweet, adorable smile he always had'...Sister



THE LINCOLN MUSEUM, FORT WAYNE, IN

The former first lady embraced spiritualism to connect with her dead sons and husband, whose "ghost" appears in this famous portrait.

Mary's eyes were wide and shining and I had the feeling of awe as if I were in the presence of the supernatural. It is unnatural and abnormal, it frightens me."

The vision could have been a dream, a product of Mary's subconscious mind or, more likely, a hallucination. It could have been a psychotic symptom. In either case, it shows Mary's complex defenses against the burden of an overwhelming loss—to which soon would be added the assassination of her husband on April 14, 1865.

Many people believed that the assassination did more than anything to unhinge Mary's already fragile mind. Her son Robert later wrote, "The shocking circumstances of my father's death completely deranged her." For the next 10 years, Mary's behavior did nothing to alter Robert's opinion.

In 1867 the family suffered the humiliation of the Old Clothes Scandal after Mary tried to sell some of her old White House gowns and jewelry in New York City under a pseudonym, only to be found out and criticized by the press. Then, in July 1871, the youngest Lincoln son, Tad, died from pleurisy. For Mary, it was another blow, beating her down after she had finally begun to recover from the traumatic loss of her husband. It once again confirmed her statement that "Ill luck presided at my birth—certainly within the last few years it has been a faithful attendant."

The four years from Tad's death in July 1871 to her insanity trial in May 1875 were her darkest. She became a homeless wanderer, roaming North America, looking for physical healing at health spas and resorts, seeking sympathy from family and friends but never finding or accepting relief or solace. She clung tenaciously to Robert and delved deeper into spiritualism and séances, seeking comfort from people who claimed to bridge the living and spiritual worlds.

By 1873, she had begun seeing Dr. Willis Danforth, one of Chicago's leading physicians, for fever and nervous derangement. It is known from Mary's letters and Danforth's trial testimony that her symptoms included severe headaches, joint and muscle pains, incontinence, swelling and insomnia. Her mental symptoms worsened to include anxiety, melancholia, persecution complexes and hallucinations. Mary told Danforth that an Indian spirit was removing and replacing her scalp, taking bones out of her face and pulling wires out of her eyes; that someone was taking steel springs from her head and would not let her rest. The major deterioration of her mental health came in March 1875, when she suddenly became convinced that Robert was deathly ill, and she would not be persuaded otherwise. She returned to Chicago to find Robert perfectly healthy.

Over the next two months, her behavior became so erratic that Robert turned to three of his father's old friends and seven medical experts for advice. They all agreed that Mary needed institutionalization. After a three-hour trial in the Cook County court, during which 18 witnesses, including a grief-stricken Robert, testified to her

derangement, she was declared insane and sent for at least one year of treatment to Bellevue Place Sanitarium in Batavia, Ill., 35 miles west of Chicago.

Mary's stay at Bellevue Place—a private asylum for “a select class of lady patients of quiet unexceptionable habits”—was formally documented by the sanitarium staff in what has become known as the “Patient Progress Reports for Bellevue Place.” The reports reveal her condition. “Mrs. Lincoln admitted today,” reads the first entry, dated May 20, 1875. “Case is one of mental impairment which probably dates back to the murder of President Lincoln—More pronounced since the death of her son, but especially aggravated during the last 2 months.”

The Bellevue logbook shows that for the first two months of her stay, Mary was quiet and solitary, a bit erratic with her desires and at times depressed. The superintendent, Dr. Richard J. Patterson, felt she was improving. Robert visited his mother every week, and said he found her cordial. “While she will not in words admit that she is not sane,” Robert wrote to a friend, “still her entire acquiescence in absolutely everything, while it arises in part from the plain enfeebled condition of her mind, makes me think that she is aware of the necessity of what has been done.”

The situation, however, was about to change from a lamentable family affair to a painful public controversy.

Myra and James Bradwell were attorneys, abolitionists, feminists and old friends of Mary Lincoln. Historians have believed that Myra Bradwell—an eager agitator for female rights—fomented and directed a plot to secure her friend's early release from the sanitarium. What is now known, however, due to the discovery of Mary's lost letters, is that Myra Bradwell was a willing and able accomplice, but it was Mary herself who created and directed the plot for freedom.

It began with a letter from Mary to the Bradwells asking them to visit Bellevue and to induce others of her powerful friends to do the same. After their visit, during which they remonstrated with Dr. Patterson about Mary's lack of freedom, the Bradwells wrote letters to Mary's sis-

*Be sure this is sent
You will, especially
on the last page,
unaware to decipher
it, I fear—
Springfield Ill
June 18th 76
Dear Mrs Bradwell:
Your most wel-
come letter, was received
last evening and I
am quickly demonst-
rating the pleasure
it afforded me by
replying at once.*

After these warm opening words to Myra Bradwell, Mary Lincoln went on to rail against Robert for his “most villainous plot to control her money.” She added that her son “could not approach us in the other world—on account of his heartless conduct, to the wife of a man who worshipped me.”

ter, Elizabeth Edwards, and her cousin, John Todd Stuart. Those letters—among the cache of newly discovered materials—suggest that either Mary greatly exaggerated her suffering to the Bradwells or the Bradwells wrote with hyperbole. Most likely it was a little of both. James Bradwell told Stuart that Mary “feels lonesome and

that the restraint of the place is unendurable.” Myra Bradwell told Edwards that Mary “feels her incarceration most terribly and desires to get out from behind the grates and bars.” Though untrue, this is a charge both Bradwells would later make to newspapers as well. The Bradwells suggested their correspondents


visit Mary at the sanitarium and that Mary accompany her sister back to Springfield for a short visit. "I cannot feel that it is necessary to keep her thus restrained," Myra Bradwell wrote.

Elizabeth Edwards' reply to Myra Bradwell, also found amid the lost letters, shows she felt the same—Mary was not sane, but it was improper to place her in a sanitarium. "Had I been consulted, I would have remonstrated earnestly against the step taken," Edwards wrote. She thought her sister simply needed a personal attendant. "The judgment of others must now, I presume, be silently acquiesced in, for a time, in the hope, that ere long, her physical and mental condition will be improved by rest and medical treatment." Edwards, recovering from a recent surgical operation, could not visit Mary herself but felt it would do her sister good to visit friends.

Mary kept in close contact with Myra Bradwell, pouring out her sorrows and frustrations, continually requesting help. She was trying to amass an army of supporters. On August 2 alone, Mary asked Myra to contact six people. She also lamented: "It does not appear that God is good, to have placed me here. I endeavor to read my Bible and offer up my petitions three times a day. But my afflicted heart fails me and my voice often falters in prayer. I have worshipped my son and no unpleasant word ever passed between us, yet I cannot understand why I should have been brought out here." The letter also shows that Mary's mania for clothing had not abated. She asked Myra Bradwell on her next visit to bring samples of black alpaca, "a best quality without luster and without cotton," as well as samples of heavier black woolen goods. She entreated Myra to keep the request a secret.

The Bradwells undertook a massive publicity campaign on Mary's behalf, giving interviews and planting articles in Chicago newspapers, all claiming that Mary was sane, imprisoned against her will and kept in inhumane conditions. One of the newly discovered letters shows that Mary herself started this publicity campaign by inviting an editor from the sensational *Chicago Times* to Bellevue. Her two-hour interview with reporter Franc B. Wilkie was printed on August 24 under the head-

Sorrento, Italy.
April 22. 1878.



*Always, you
affectionate
friend,
Mary Lincoln*

My dear Mrs Bradwell:

In the quiet of this beautiful place, I have been thinking a good deal of you and have concluded to inflict a letter upon you, so that I too, may not be entirely forgotten by yourself & the Judge. A few weeks since, I came round by sea, from Marseille to Naples, and as it was my second visit to Mr. Lathrop's

In this previously unknown letter to Myra Bradwell from Italy, Mary Lincoln reminisced about the postwar travels that the Lincolns had planned, then added: "God works in such a mysterious way and we are left to bow to his will. But to some of us, *resignation* will never come."

line "MRS. LINCOLN. Her Physicians Pronounce Her Entirely Sane." It stated she was afraid that her time at Bellevue would actually make her insane. It also attributed her pretrial behavior to fever and a shattered nervous system.

Dr. Patterson and Robert Lincoln were furious. Their indignation was magnified

by the fact that the reporter had visited on a Saturday, when the doctor was away.

Over the next two weeks, a flurry of activity occurred, with letters and visits between all the principals: Robert Lincoln, Mary Lincoln, Myra Bradwell, James Bradwell, Dr. Patterson and Elizabeth Edwards. By mid-August, stories about

Mary's incarceration were in the newspapers almost every day. Robert Lincoln and Dr. Patterson forbid the Bradwells to make any more visits, but the damage had been done. In early September, Robert allowed his mother to leave Bellevue and live with her sister in Springfield.

For the next eight months, Mary lived with Elizabeth under Robert's conservatism of her money and property. Her anger at him for having her committed was further fueled by this indignity.

On June 15, 1876, the verdict of a second trial in county court declared Mary Lincoln "restored to reason" and capable of governing her property. Four days later she wrote to Robert, denouncing his "wicked conduct" against her and demanding the return of all her property. "Send me all I have written for, you have tried your game of robbery long enough," she wrote. This attests to Mary's belief that Robert had put her in Bellevue to steal her money and property. However, under Robert's stewardship, her money actually increased its value by more than \$4,000, and he asked for no compensation.

One of the more interesting letters Mary wrote Myra Bradwell was dated June 18, 1876, the day before she sent a final condemnation letter to Robert. She decried him as a thief who, desiring her money, "brought false charges against me" and committed "imprecations against you all," and she encouraged the Bradwells and the *Chicago Times'* Franc Wilkie to write articles denouncing Robert. "Have justice rendered me," she wrote. "I have been a deeply wronged woman, by one, for whom I would have poured out my life's blood."

A few months later, after severing contact with Robert, Mary left for Europe. She claimed she could not bear the soothing manner of people who would never stop thinking of her as a lunatic. Ten of the lost letters date from 1876-78 and provide insight into Mary's European years, including a long letter during her trip to Sorrento, Italy, about which nothing had previously been known. The letters are calm, rational and cogent. Mary offers an explanation for her peaceful mood in a December

1876 letter: "I am allowed tranquility here and am not harassed by a demon." The demon, presumably, is Robert.

Mary's post-Bellevue letters also attest to her love for the Bradwells. In later years, she wrote, "When all others, among them my husband's supposed friends, failed me in the most bitter hours of my life, these loyal hearts, Myra and James Bradwell, came to my assistance and rescued me under great difficulty from confinement in an insane asylum."

In October 1880, Mary returned from Europe in declining health and went to Springfield to live with her sister. She spent more of her time in her room, sitting in the dark with a single candle, packing and unpacking her 64 trunks of clothing. The next year, not long after Robert had been appointed President James A. Garfield's secretary of war, she and her only living son reconciled. On July 15, 1882, at the age of 64, Mary Lincoln died in her sister's home, most likely of complications from diabetes. **CWT**

Finding the (Lost) Letters

On a dreary day in March 2005, I sat in Robert Todd Lincoln's mansion in Manchester, Vermont, looking through his old papers. Alone in the house—the first outside historian there in 30 years—I came across two letters regarding Mary Lincoln's correspondence with her friend Myra Bradwell. As every Lincoln scholar knows, this correspondence had been missing for some 80 years.

The first letter I read was written by Lincoln family attorney Frederic N. Towers and addressed to Katherine Helm, a Lincoln cousin engaged in writing the first and only authorized biography of Mary Todd Lincoln: "My dear Miss Helm: We had quite a surprise party last Wednesday, and Mrs. Lincoln [Mary Harlan

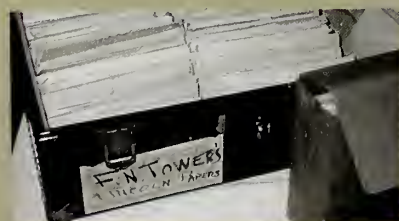
Lincoln, Robert Lincoln's wife] has asked that I write to you and tell you about it," the letter began. It went on to say that Myra Pritchard, Myra Bradwell's granddaughter, owned numerous letters between the first lady and her friend. Pritchard informed Mary Harlan Lincoln that she was preparing a book and tacitly agreed to let her review it. Towers' other letter was to Pritchard, arranging a meeting in Washington, D.C.

These letters were my first clues to the lost Lincoln-Bradwell letters. To identify

Bradwell descendants, I read Myra Bradwell's biography by Jane M. Friedman, who put me in touch with a distant relative of Myra Pritchard, James Gordon. He let me see his family papers, which disclosed that Mary Harlan Lincoln had threatened to sue Pritchard over her book, then bought Pritchard's family letters, her unpublished manuscript and her publishing contract. Gordon's papers revealed that Pritchard in fact owned 32 letters from Mary Lincoln to Myra Bradwell, as well as other correspondents' letters about Mary Lincoln's mental illness and commitment. Gordon did

not have the letters or the book manuscript, but he did have files about their sale.

Once I discovered this was a legal affair, I sought out the files of Lincoln family attorneys at Frost & Towers, a now-defunct Washington, D.C., law firm. After five months of research I reached Frederic C. Towers, the son of Robert Lincoln's attorney, who recently uncovered an old steamer trunk in his attic that had belonged to his father. I went to New York to see it, the first person outside the Lincoln family and their advisers to review its contents. There in the chest, labeled "F.N. Towers Lincoln Papers," I found Myra Pritchard's manuscript, business and legal papers of Robert and Mary Harlan Lincoln, documents on Mary Todd Lincoln's insanity case, and her no-longer lost letters. **J.E.**



This steamer trunk yielded 20 previously unseen and unpublished letters by Mary Lincoln and five others on her insanity case by various authors.

COURTESY OF JASON EMERSON



Mock trial finds Mary Todd Lincoln was not insane

Re-enactment at presidential museum finds former first lady wrongfully committed

By Jason Nevel

GateHouse News Service

Posted Oct 01, 2012 @ 10:44 PM

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SPRINGFIELD — Jurors in 1875 made the wrong choice in committing Mary Todd Lincoln to a mental institution, a retrial of the famous case found Monday.

The re-enactment was held at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum, with area judges serving as attorneys arguing for and against the widow of President Lincoln. The audience served as the jury.

In 1875, the nation's former first lady was judged insane during a trial in Chicago and ordered to a Batavia sanitarium. She obtained an early release, and, one year later, another jury found her sane.

For more than 100 years, historians have debated whether there was enough evidence to ever commit Mrs. Lincoln to an institution. In Monday's event, actors in period costumes portrayed Mary Todd Lincoln and her son Robert Lincoln, who filed the petition to have his mother involuntarily committed. The retrial lasted more than two hours.

The vote on whether to institutionalize the troubled first lady was 68 for and 159 against. A similar retrial was held Sept. 24 in Chicago. Audience members there also overwhelmingly disagreed with the initial verdict.

Beth Pendergast, a Springfield audience member, said she believed there was enough to prove Mary Todd Lincoln was insane based on her erratic behavior.

Historical accounts describe Mary Todd Lincoln as slowly going insane after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the death of three sons. However, some people argue Robert Lincoln was trying to protect the family's reputation.

To open up the trial, Robert Lincoln, portrayed by Zach Kenney of Chicago, was questioned by a lawyer portrayed by Ronald Spears, a circuit judge in Christian County.

Robert Lincoln said his mother, for unknown reasons, thought he was ill and traveled from Florida to Chicago to see him. On the train ride there, she said someone tried to poison her coffee and steal her purse, he said.

While staying at a hotel in Chicago, Robert Lincoln further testified that his mother thought the city of Chicago was on fire, she could hear voices through the walls, and his mother thought he was going to kill her. There was also testimony about Mrs. Lincoln's spending habits.

Having her committed was for her safety, Robert Lincoln said.

"I want to protect her and provide her the treatment she needs," he said.

Mrs. Lincoln's defense said she feared for Robert Lincoln's safety because her three other sons had died of illness. Her actions were motivated by her desire to protect her surviving son, her lawyer said.

The defense also pointed out that Mary Todd Lincoln, portrayed by Pam Brown of Springfield, had never harmed herself or anybody else and was not a risk to society.

On the stand, Mrs. Lincoln addressed the accusations about her lavish spending, saying it "fills a big void in my life."

She also questioned Robert Lincoln's motivation.

"Robert wants my money, and that's what this is all about," she testified.

After the vote, Brown said the re-enactments show how legal and medical theories about mental illness have advanced.

"I've always said, with some Prozac and a good therapist, she probably would have been fine," Brown said of Mary Todd Lincoln.

The sold-out event was sponsored by the Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

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